

Sunday, February 13, 2005

2:56 PM

nuc book/ what needs telling?

What do I know—from my classified work, and subsequent study—that the public has never learned or doesn't understand—which is still timely and urgent, in terms of foreseeing current dangers both from US nuclear policy and the behavior of new nuclear states, and for the prospects of proliferation?

1. The USG always thought of nuclear weapons in terms of combat use, not merely deterrence. (It was some of the initial scientists, like Rotblat (and some others, according to the Goodchild book on Teller) who believed their use should and would be used only to deter German use; others saw that the USG would “have” to use the weapon to shorten the war, to avoid political reproach.)

This held for use against Germany; then against Japanⁱⁱⁱ; then against Russia. In the case of Russia, the threat of first strike was, indeed, to deter Soviet armies from conventional attack against West Europe: or, e.g., against Iran (Nitze to Acheson and Kennan, 1949: concern for Middle East oil. See Foreign Affairs ref.)

iii

2. After November, 1944, by which time the US realized that there was no German program, the highest US deliberations always contemplated or threatened US first-use (FU) against a non-nuclear state: except for the case of the Soviet Union after late 1949. After Japan, there were FU threats against Russia over northern Iran (1946) and over Berlin (1948), against Korea and China (1950: Russia still essentially non-nuclear despite one test.
3. After that, the targets of our threats were either nuclear-armed (Russia) or allied to Russia (China, 1954, 1958), Korea (1953), DRV (1954), DRV/China (1955-60), Laos/China (1961), Soviet Union (1961, 1962), DRV (1964, 1968, 1969, 1972, 1973-74). An exception was Iraq over Kuwait (1958).

Thus:

4. After 1950, the US couldn't seriously contemplate—or credibly threaten—to launch a nuclear attack, either tactical or strategic, without strong reason for confidence that the Soviets would not respond with nuclear weapons, to defend against or retaliate to US nuclear attack on themselves or their ally. That meant that to make any nuclear threat at all, the US had to have a reliable ability to disarm the Soviet nuclear capability altogether, to make it unlikely that the Soviets could strike second at all against the US homeland, and very highly unlikely that their retaliation, if any, could be massive. Only with such a capability—an overwhelming first-strike capability—could the US plan, or even appear to be confident, that it could hit a third-world ally of the Soviet Union with

nuclear weapons without being paralyzed from doing so by the fear of possible Soviet retaliation, either locally or limited strategic reprisal. What could give it that confidence would be the threat that such a retaliation would be suicidal for the SU; it would be unacceptably likely, if not certain, to result in escalation to a strategic first-strike by the US.^{iv}

5. Therefore: US strategic nuclear plans were first-strike plans, not “second strike” plans designed either for retaliation against a Soviet nuclear first strike (FS) against the US or to deter such an attack.^v In retrospect, the Soviets *never* had the capability for a plausible disarming first strike against the US, *nor* the intention of attempting to acquire it.^{vi}

US posture and policies were premised upon maintaining a radical asymmetry between Soviet and US nuclear capabilities. Functionally, US nuclear superiority in strategic forces was intended to allow the US to extend a “nuclear umbrella” to US allies or clients both in Europe and in the Third World, principally Asia and the Middle East. That is, the US offered (with or without invitation) to reply to an overwhelming conventional attack by Soviet, Chinese, Warsaw Pact or Soviet client forces on US allies or clients with a limited but devastating first-use nuclear attack with US tactical or strategic forces. That was meant to deter any conventional attack, or at least, its escalation to levels that would overwhelm local allied and perhaps US conventional forces.

At the same time, the US strategic superiority was designed to prevent the Soviets from extending a comparable, or even a more limited, nuclear “umbrella” (or even a plausible conventional umbrella) over its allies or potential clients. Not only was it to be impossible for the Soviets to contemplate offering or carrying out a threat of Soviet first-use to protect their allies in a conventional conflict (for fear of a US strategic disarming attack: or at least, a heavy limited nuclear response, in confidence that it would not be responded to in kind for fear of escalation to a US first-strike. They could not even promise credibly to reply in kind to a limited first-use of nuclear weapons against their ally: i.e. they could not offer a reliable nuclear “umbrella” even against US nuclear attack, let alone against the kind of conventional attack the US first-use threat was designed to deter.

The declared need for this asymmetry—this US superiority—in nuclear capabilities and threats was to offset a contrary asymmetry in conventional forces, “threatening” the borders of our allies and client states. This supposed need rested on two premises, one of them physically obvious. That was that many of these allies and clients literally shared a border with the Soviet Union, China, or the Warsaw Pact countries essentially occupied by Soviet forces: and all of these latter countries of the “Sino-Soviet bloc” maintained very much larger or more effective conventional forces than their neighbors. That was a fact. The second premise was that the Soviet Union and China lusted to expand into these neighboring countries, either by armed invasion (like Hitler or Japan) or by subversion and intimidation in the shadow of a threat of invasion (as in the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia). The two together implied that the expansion of Soviet and Chinese tyranny could be deterred only by the prospect of a US-supplied nuclear defense.

For the reasons spelled out above, that required a credible US disarming first-strike capability to deter Soviet-supplied nuclear responses to US first-use.^{vii}

But why did the US need to be so concerned about the possibility of Soviet expansion either by armed attack or intimidation, in all of these countries around the world? In the case of Western Europe, that seemed to answer itself. (return to this) But why elsewhere?

The declared reasons: ...(which created some “realities,” in terms of domestic politics and the expectations of our adversaries and allies, once the declarations were presented and the commitments and investments made). Freedom; appeasement and encouragement; dominos and ultimately large stakes; bases and listening posts; containment; (for Ike, roll-back, in campaign);

But why take on commitments to conventional help and nuclear threats right up to the entire border of the Soviet Union and China?!

Because in the case of Iran and the Middle East: OIL. Cuba 1961-62 and *Turkey*: domestic politics and perceived balance of power (maintenance of asymmetry of strategic power and “rights”). In Central and Latin America: sphere of influence (plantations). Vietnam: (hst, 1945-48, relations with France, Britain and Germany; then, for hst after 1949 and Ike, JFK and LBJ (1953-68), domestic politics; under Nixon, triangular international relations, and domestic politics.

5. Unknown both to public and RAND: enormous US superiority, in objective capability, persisted for 20 years into the nuclear era, not merely 5 or 6 years. This reflected secret US knowledge of extremely inferior Soviet forces in scale and in vulnerability. (It was also true that the disparity in favor of Soviet conventional forces facing Europe, if any, was secretly known to be very much less than NATO official estimates).
6. Therefore, USG willingness to contemplate US FU—*if necessary*—to maintain US dominance in countries on the border of the Sino-Soviet Bloc was very much greater than the public and public elites imagined, and greater than the USG saw fit to make public.

A number of threats were made, secretly, not at all pure bluffs. And these were less reckless than the public would have supposed, if they had become aware of them without sharing the USG secret knowledge of the real strategic balance. Nevertheless, they were in fact extremely dangerous, from a global and long-run point of view; and even bore real risks, despite the balance, of triggering an all-out strategic exchange which would have been catastrophic for the Northern Hemisphere for reasons of which the US was totally ignorant at the time and for the next generation. (Compare the uncertainties surrounding atmospheric ignition, and Fermi’s last-minute worries about unrecognized environmental effects. That wasn’t a reality in 1945; it was a near-certainty from 1956 till 1983.)

Estimates of the probability or possibility of disaster arising from the Cuban Missile Crisis (or the Berlin Crisis of the previous year) have fluctuated greatly since 1962. Not till the Eighties (and ever since) was it recognized that likelihood of all-out nuclear catastrophe was extremely high. And I am aware (from my study in 1964) for reasons never published before that it was even higher, we were closer to war, than any account has so far estimated. (That may also have been true of the Berlin Crisis). (Ironically, the resolution of the Berlin Crisis, for the short-run, in 1961, probably contributed to the emergence of the Cuban Crisis the next year, for reasons to which I, inadvertently, contributed significantly. (I long thought that my actions in 1961—sometimes alluded to historically but never accurately—contributed significantly to the ending of the Berlin Crisis. Apparently, as Sy Hersh has shown, I was wrong about that. I never thought I contributed to the resolution of the Cuban Crisis, nor did I. But very regrettably, I have to conclude that I did contribute measurably in 1961 to the fact that the Cuban Crisis arose in 1962. And my 1964 study of that crisis revealed to me how close that came to destroying civilization in the Northern Hemisphere, at least.

Another aspect of that Crisis was that it involved Khrushchev's consciously imitating US FU threats in Europe over the previous decade, including a willingness to delegate authority to launch nuclear weapons as well as to deploy them on the borders of his superpower adversary.

END NOTES

ⁱ In the case of Japan, actual combat use was to “deter” the Japanese military from holding out for an explicit promise to keep the Emperor, or better, from their point of view, for a promise that they themselves would not be tried by the Allies for war crimes, or perhaps even that the US would not occupy Japan, or all of it. (Better thought of as “compellence”: of surrender on US terms, without an explicit promise of keeping the Emperor, or even an implicit promise until after the Bomb had been dropped, thus obscuring in American political debate the effect of the compromise of unconditional surrender demands. (see note iii below).

ii

ⁱⁱⁱ Compare: Nixon’s acceptance of the terms of a negotiated agreement, agreed to in October with the DRV, postponed until after the Christmas bombing, so that he would appear to have shot his way to a settlement that was presumably more favorable to us than could have been achieved earlier, without the attack, and as favorable as could be achieved.

Likewise, Bill Bundy proposed in October and November of 1964 that the US should go to Geneva and take whatever terms we could get as an agreement, but postpone proposing this till after one or two raids against the North, so that we could get the benefit of the above impression of “forcing” a settlement on the North, of not lacking any aggressiveness, of getting the best terms achievable, and of simply preempting an international demand for negotiations rather than being anxious to seek terms and avoid escalation on our own account. Others, specifically McNamara, may have thought that the initial attacks would actually enable us to get favorable, acceptable terms, and that Hanoi would press for negotiations to this effect without our having to appear to seek negotiations. But both were disappointed: Hanoi wouldn’t negotiate at all while we were bombing, and had no interest in making fundamental concessions, nor did the international community “force” us to get into talks by proposing them, nor was Johnson (or the JCS) willing to initiate talks on our own.

For their part, the North Vietnamese military believed that we would give better terms if negotiations started after we had “gotten a bloody nose” by suffering an NVA offensive: just as the Japanese Army believed they would do better after “one more big battle”: first, Okinawa, then, the initial landings in Japan. The DRV acted on this mistake twice: in Tet, 1968, and the Easter offensive in 1972, both times rejecting serious negotiations in advance of the offensive, suffering great losses for very little (though in 1968 they may have forestalled a US land invasion of NVN, though narrowly risking triggering it).

^{iv} [As I write this, I’m becoming aware of the fact that little of this was understood by me or by any of my RAND mentors in the decade of the Fifties, and even the Sixties. Despite our Top Secret clearances—indeed, largely because of them—they, and I, were in a state of ignorance about the true strategic balance, and about the understanding of that by the JCS and White House, and about the purposes of nuclear posture and the aims of US foreign policy that reflected high Administration thinking—that was different from

that of the public and elite commentators but was just as great, just as removed from the reality both of the balance and of US foreign and defense policy.

As a result, we didn't understand Administration motives or the real considerations shaping SAC posture. Our contempt for the shortcomings, "prejudices" and inefficiency, even "irrationality" of the policies and posture—in the light of what we supposed to be the relevant criteria and strategic aims (which we took to be either self-evident, or in line with Administration declarations)—was almost entirely misplaced. The true policies were indeed insanely reckless from a global and long-run perspective (e.g., they involved horrific short-run risks for our allies and many other countries, hostile or neutral; and they virtually ensured long-run proliferation, vertical and horizontal, with increasing risks for ourselves) but the dangers were quite different than the ones we obsessed about: the likelihood of "inviting" by our vulnerability a Soviet Pearl Harbor attack, a Soviet first strike out of the blue or in a conventional crisis.

I don't want to imply misleadingly that the picture I am giving is what I or any of my colleagues understood at the time. Nor is it the case that I can prove it conclusively with documents, either from the period or later, up till today. But I'm realizing that it would be largely a waste of time and readers' patience, indeed confusing overall, to explain at any length how it looked to us/me at the time and through the Sixties.

The most relevant aspect of that history (of the RAND delusions, in-between the delusions of the public and outside commentators and analysts, and the realities-plus-delusions of the JCS and SAC and the White House) would be to explain how someone both intelligent, concerned about morality, and with access to Top Secret information—myself, and my respected colleagues—could be brought to participate in plans that could clearly lead to the extermination of hundreds of millions of people, either by accident or by deliberate decisions of the President and top military leaders.

That explanation, at least briefly, is probably needed to keep readers paying attention to me at all: without inferring wrongly that I was, with my colleagues, a kind of monster who must be listened to with the greatest skepticism still today: and who was not representative of the kinds of officials who served, say, under Carter and Clinton or Russia today. And that's very relevant to understanding how others like ourselves could be—indeed, certainly are—participating in such planning today, both in the US and in every other nuclear state, perhaps especially in the newest ones.

For the rest of this outline, I'll assert the realities of the period from 1950 on as they were—as I understand them today, not as I saw them from RAND or even the Defense Department through the Sixties. (My real awareness began in late 1974, when I first learned that Richard Nixon had seriously planned nuclear first-use in Indochina in 1969; and then, by pursuing this lead, realized that first-use threat had been made repeatedly since 1946, and to the present. That changed my understanding of the seriousness, and purpose, of US strategic first-strike policies throughout the entire Cold War era and beyond.)]

^v (Not till the late Sixties did the Soviets begin to acquire a real capability for a damage-limiting preemptive attack, with prospects no more, though no less, insanely reckless than SAC was still pursuing in that period).

^{vi} For a period, about 1954-61, the Air Force (and RAND) and to some extent the CIA, did believe that the SU had both the intention and the probable capability to acquire such a force, and might even have acquired it by the end of that period. But even then, LeMay and his successor Power at SAC were confident that they would have adequate warning (by methods not known to RAND or the public) to preempt any attempt to launch the Soviet force, which they knew (by methods and to an extent not guessed by RAND or the public) to be highly vulnerable to a preemptive attack. Thus, even during this period, SAC and theater forces were really postured for a first strike, either in the context of escalation from an ongoing or impending theater conflict or of preemption. Thus, they took little account of possible vulnerability to a Soviet first-strike—RAND's preoccupation—for reasons never understood by RAND (i.e., me, or my mentors Wohlstetter, Rowen, et al, before), which found this neglect purely negligent, wishful, bureaucratically inert or ignorant.

During this period (I came to RAND in the midst of it, 1958) RAND, following USAF intelligence estimates of Soviet nuclear buildup and even going beyond them, was greatly over-estimating Soviet strategic offensive forces and capabilities, and greatly underestimating (to the point of total neglect) Soviet vulnerabilities to a US first-strike.

^{vii} Prior to 1949-50, with a US nuclear monopoly, in principle the US could have credibly threatened first-use of tactical nuclear weapons to defeat any Soviet or satellite (e.g. North Korean or East German) conventional attack without fear of any nuclear response. In other words, there would have been no need to back up such a threat with a strategic capability against the Soviet Union. Indeed, MacArthur urged such an attack against Chinese forces in Korea, or against China itself, in the winter of 1950-51, and the JCS secretly considered possible targets for the President, who threatened such use openly. And Truman claimed to have made nuclear threats in 1946 to drive the Soviets out of northern Iran, and definitely made tacit threats to prevent a prolonged or effective Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948.

Yet, ironically, in none of these cases did the US get close to serious planning to use only tactical weapons against locally deployed Soviet forces, for the simple reason that the US had very few atomic weapons, and the JCS were reluctant to plan to subtract them from plans for strategic attack on the Soviet Union itself to use in a local conflict. By the time the US had a large inventory of nuclear weapons, including tactical weapons—about 1954—the Soviets had a significant enough arsenal themselves to make

it necessary to be able to disarm them inside the SU if the US were to contemplate using tactical weapons against Soviet forces or its allies anywhere.

Thus, US atomic weapons were directed entirely to use against the SU homeland before 1950, and almost entirely so through 1953, because the JCS and SAC believed they had barely enough weapons for that strategic purpose till then. And later, with vastly increasing numbers of weapons, they still needed to concentrate on SU and Warsaw Pact targets, to deter or prevent Soviet use of nuclear weapons in reply to possible US limited use of tactical weapons.

ppilproposal
 1 May 1990
 5:00 AM

PENTAGON PAPERS II: WHAT ELSE I COPIED

At 4:02 AM on the night of April 30-May 1--the 15th anniversary of the ending of the Vietnam War and the entry of the NLF/NVA into Saigon--I woke up with the thought:

On the Twentieth Anniversary of the publishing of the Pentagon Papers: I could publish the missing parts of the papers I copied, the parts that never got out, including the parts that got "lost in the hurricane."

Moreover, I could publish a book that would tell the story surrounding those parts: the part of my life that dealt with nuclear planning, first-use threats and "inadvertent war," both before and after the Pentagon Papers, including my earlier, mostly unsuccessful efforts to get all this to public attention and to create an antinuclear movement.

This would also cover: Why Nixon really tried to stop me. Why HAK thought I was "the most dangerous man in America," why the Plumbers were really set on me, what they wanted to keep me from telling: Nixon's secret nuclear threats to Vietnam (and his real policy to end, and win, the war. His--my--"Madman Theory."

 After all, I had always believed that--in the absence of the actual documents, many of which had been lost--this story needed a booster to launch it into adequate public attention, comparable to Nixon's injunctions against the Pentagon Papers and his indictment of me.

That is why I wanted it to come out as a Congressional hearing (which could subpoena witnesses), or as a news story (which, again, could draw on the testimony of other sources). It is why I first told parts of the story as a witness on trial, under oath, at Rocky Flats; and later courted indictment, by releasing Halperin's Taiwan Straits Crisis study in Japan.

Why have I waited twenty years to tell these things? I haven't! The myriad efforts I've made to get this news out in the above forms are part of this story, along with the uniform failure to break through into major media (which means the contents of the revelations are still news, with respect to the American public and the mass media).

The notion that I woke up with, a little over an hour ago, was that the Twentieth Anniversary observances next June could be the launching pad for these revelations. They may not take off at all--certainly, not like the first batch--but this occasion would give them the best chance for attention they could have had in years.

Moreover, this is a project that is doable in a year: unlike my overall autobiography, or even

the primary tale of the copying and distribution of the Pentagon Papers and what led up to it, which deserves to be more artfully written.

I've always thought that my autobiography had to be two books, because of length and the way the story split in two, half dealing with Vietnam and the decision to release the Papers, half dealing with my concern with nuclear war and what I had learned about it. To do justice to both parts in one book would make it too long especially if I included the actual documents and information on nuclear matters that had never been released, and gave this the analytical treatment it deserved.

If there were to be two books, the "nuclear" one should come first, I always thought (rightly or wrongly: most people--except for Randy Kehler, in November 1969!--disagreed, though without really knowing what I had to say on nuclear matters). It was more urgent, of greater long-run significance and of immediate relevance to the anti-nuclear movement and to possible legislative action and arms control policymaking.

Whether or not I was wrong to delay now, the same arguments were strong for putting this out now, rather than later. Bush will probably enter into START II negotiations this year, but reluctantly, and with the content not yet determined. He is almost sure to do so without a real sense of urgency: which is just what could be conveyed by these revelations, which all bear upon the persistent question: What has been, what remains, the real risk of nuclear war in the nuclear era?

Recall my draft statement for Congressional hearings on these subjects, never held: "I believe that secrecy on nuclear matters has threatened the survival of civilization."

(Thought of these unheld hearings reminds me of the whole story of the theft of my documents in 1974, their transfer to House Government Operations, and the aborted plans for hearings on them. Thus--virtually the whole file of what I have to say has been in Government hands since 1974, though the public hasn't gotten the message.)

The whole Cuban Missile Crisis story is, potentially, part of this account (though much of the relevant new data, and the interpretations and hypotheses reflecting them, was not available to me before the last few years). Recently it occurred to me that the continuing relevance of this episode--despite the ending of the Cold War and the decline in the short-run risk of nuclear war--is the warning it poses of the risks of proliferation (and of continued high levels of "modernized" weapons in the hands of the superpowers), given the recklessness it reveals "even" in superpower leaders.

But this same lesson follows from the whole body of information I have to reveal. That was always the meaning of that information, that experience, for me, and why I thought it must come out, even though, initially, I expected it to put me in jail for life, if the first batch of the Pentagon Papers, the Vietnam part, didn't do that first.

Thus, whether or not I should have written all this sooner, it will never again be more timely

to reveal these data than the coming year. It may give both superpower negotiations and antinuclear movements in other states a kick in the right direction just when it is most needed. If it doesn't, no later release would have had better prospects. Either way, I can then at last proceed to Book II, how Vietnam and the struggle to understand and end it changed me and how the Pentagon Papers were released.

There are two aspects to Book I (many parts of which could come out first, or simultaneously, as articles): the contents of the information to be released, including documents, and my interpretation of them; and the story of my efforts to get the information to the public, including movement activities and civil disobedience.

Part I: The Unreleased Data

--The Delegation of Presidential Authority to Use Nuclear Weapons. Deception about this during 1964 campaign.

--The nature of the JSCP and the SIOP.

--The general problem of unauthorized action. The situation at Kunsan. (And my initial memo on authentication and unauthorized action: and the possibility of a PAL. See my D on Command and Control). Accidents and unauthorized action (see Sagan's interest).

--War Plans: GEOP, NATO, JSCP.

--In particular: the emphasis on preemption; the first-use/first-strike likelihood; actual expectations as to the likelihood of precipitating incidents (e.g, uprising in East Germany); allout nature; "alternative undertakings";

--Actual deployment of nuclear weapons in Japan: Iwakuni.
(Subsequent confirmation of this. Implications for Japan Security Treaty; inferences as to why no action by McNamara).

(All the above were covered in my January 1960 briefing to Bundy, reflected in his memo to JFK given to me by Sagan).

--My memos on the Emergency Action Message, "actual consequences of release"; on NATO planning; etc. [Try to get these from RAND, via FOIA: a test case of use of FOIA for a contractor?!]

--The nuclear references censored out of the Pentagon Papers, and out of the published negotiations volumes.

--My draft of the Basic National Security Policy, the basis of SecDef guidance for the JSCP 63 and, it appears, for later Carter/Reagan planning. My accompanying memos for this. (Note that no documents on this planning have yet been released under FOIA).

--My draft of the Deputy SecDef "questions" on the JSCP and the story of their non-response. (Talk to Gilpatric about this).

--My (JFK) question to the JCS on fatalities in the SU and China, and their response.

--Draft of McNamara message to SAC, Power, on new options for SIOP.

--Later notes on modified JSCPs, and new BNSP.

--Material in my 1971 briefing to Charlie Nesson, on patterns of secrecy in USG.

--Whole file on Cuban Missile Crisis: transcripts, notes: including:

--Nitze's personal notes on ExComm (never released to historians—see Trachtenberg note: Nitze told Blight and Welch he had lost them!), and my interview with him, and with Yarmolinsky, bearing on his and McNamara's and Rusk's initial reaction ("We would have to eat them.")

--Whole story of PSALM clearance; Cline interview.
Effects of "lying in State," on JFK's own surprise by the missiles. Indications of JFK option of concealing evidence on the missiles till the election; and how this bore on Khrushchev's possible plan to control the risks of his project, and hence on his timing (both otherwise till now unexplained).

--hsr study in August: early concern about the possibility of missiles.

--Mongoose documents: though newly released in 1989, link to me via Lansdale! And via "plumbers"! Relation to "provocation planning" known to me in connection with Tonkin Gulf incidents in 1964! (And see briefing to me by CIA in 1961, and my reaction: "This is all good fun, but what is the point of it? Where does it lead?")

--McN memo (never released) of October 2 on occasions for implementing invasion or attack plans.

--My own experience in Crisis, including Rostow briefings, and my own memos.

--Turkish missiles! What JFK really had ordered, what he and McN feared...what I worked on Saturday night. Added to recent revelations on JFK and McN expectations as to how the crisis would be resolved, this bears on what JFK's real strategy was, and how much his actions involved bluffs (neither of which has ever been imagined in published analyses).

--The incident on the night of October 26, 1962: what I learned, what I drew from it...and subsequent revelations on this and on Cuban anti-aircraft and inferences...How the Crisis could actually have exploded in its last 24 hours, despite the personal willingness of both leaders to settle without war.

--My whole theory, and manuscript, on "Faits Malaccomplis." (See new data by Goldgeier).

--Hypotheses on risk-taking by leaders, reflecting Kahneman-Tversky findings: bringing in data on LBJ in 1965 (and the Challenger, and other cases of Constructing a Catastrophe).

--My experience with plans for invasion of Cuba in 1961, and my visit to Guantanamo. The actual costs and risks of possible war in Cuba, as seen from the perspective of Vietnam (and Panama).

--Notes on Rowen's and Nitze's actual expectations of the odds on nuclear war (Nitze: 1 in 10).

--Khrushchev-JFK letters, including the still-misinterpreted October 26 letter. (These have now been released, yet the latter crucial letter is still almost universally mis-described, reflecting the initial misleading paraphrases of it. The actual lack of clear contradiction between the "Friday night" and "Saturday morning" letters has never been recognized).

--My interview with RFK 1964, on two ultimatums (and, e.g., on whether Dobrynin had "lost his usefulness").

--The actual deceptions by Soviet officials: Did they "lie"? Why not? Why the emphasis on this by American officials?

--

--Notes from my 1964 Crisis Study, including, in addition to Cuba material above:

--Minutes of Vienna Conference, 1961, and Paris Conference 1960 (bearing on U-2; plus interviews with Bissell).

--WSEG Critical Incidents Studies, including Laos Study and Tonkin Gulf Study.

--Halperin's Taiwan Straits Study, including nuclear parts still censored.

--State Department study of Berlin Crisis.

--Notes on Suez crisis.

--Documents on Vietnam, drafted for Kissinger in 1968-69:

--NSSM-1.

--Summary of responses on NSSM-1.

--Options Paper (never released!)

--Try to get on FOIA the Kissinger NSSMs on nuclear matters from my RAND safe.

5-7-07

The Question

J. Alfred Prufrock invites us to walk “through certain half-deserted streets,
the muttering retreats, of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
and sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells: Streets that follow like a tedious
argument of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...
Oh, do not ask, “What is it?””

And later in the poem, ‘would it have been worth it, after all, to say... I am Lazarus,
come from the dead, Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all.”

The overwhelming question to which perhaps only Lazarus can give the answer is: Can
humanity, in the era of nuclear weapons, transcend its proclivity to the slaughter of the
innocent, before it destroys itself and most other forms of life?

Title:

The most Dangerous Lifetime

In 1932, when I was 1-year old, the Japanese bombed the city of Shanghai killing several
thousands of civilians. Later in the decade, the Japanese bombed Chung King and Nazi
aircraft destroyed Guernica in Spain.

These bombings were recognized by the world as clear cut violations of the laws of war
which incorporated the centuries old principles of just war which forbade deliberate
attacks on noncombatants (Ernest Hemingway was a journalist in Spain reporting on the
German bombing of Spanish cities deliberately at the moment when theatre-goers were
leaving the cinema. “This was not war,” he said. “This was murder.”)

On the day that the Second World War began in Europe, Sept. 1 1939, with the Nazi
invasion of Poland, Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote to Great Britain, France and Germany
asking them to commit not to use their airplanes to attack cities and innocent civilians.
[use Markusen and Kopf, p.151 “Referring primarily to the air bombardment of cities
during World War I, which had killed thousands of noncombatants, Roosevelt wrote,
‘The ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centers of population during
the course of hostilities...has sickened the hearts of every civilized man and women, and
has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.’ He urged ‘every Government
which may be engaged in hostilities publicly to affirm its determination that its armed

forces shall in no event, and under no circumstances, undertake the bombardment from the air of civilian populations or of unfortified cities.' ...Markusen continues]

My point, suggested by Bill Ury's book *Getting to Peace*, is that this is the first period in the history of human evolution -- that is, the last 3-4 million years, and specifically the last ten thousand years of recorded human history-- that humans have been able to accomplish the quick destruction of civilization in terms of cities and organized life and possibly the extermination of most complex forms of life on the planet. The point of this would be that this is not just a theoretical possibility but that it has led to the production, deployment, training, alerting, and indeed, threatening of forces capable of carrying out precisely this destruction on a moment's notice. And this force is commanded by officials typical of national leaders of the last few millennia, some of whom have shown themselves in each period to be capable of slaughtering large numbers of innocent people, although never on this scale.

For decades, I wrestled with the question of how to describe strategic bombing and its heir, "nuclear war" in terms of accepted categories of war crimes. There's no question that both of these violate all definitions of just means in warfare accepted prior to WWII. And indeed, they do fit under the legal definitions of genocide in the UN Genocide Convention which defines genocide as "the deliberate killing of civilians with intent to destroy all or part of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such." To say 'part' is obviously ambiguous but can be assumed to refer to some significant fraction that would be more than a massacre but not necessarily full-scale extermination.

A problem with describing these as genocide, however, is that despite the legal definition, the term is rarely used except in terms of on the one hand, ethnic or racial groups, and on the other hand, outside the context of military operations intended to propose surrender. It is often pointed out against the use of 'genocide' for such bombing that unlike the case of the Holocaust, the bombing of Germans and Japanese ended with surrender and the ending of the war.

If in fact the definition of genocide were to exclude for purposes of the legal definition of the crime, operations intended to produce surrender, that would correspond to the way the word is generally accepted or used. It would leave however the question of defining the no less horrific crime of the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians. The word to describe that in order to produce surrender or demoralization in a war would seem to be "terrorism" although that word is almost never used because it would have to apply to operations mainly done by the allies in WWII and by the US in Korea (arguably in Vietnam and Iraq too, though distinctions can be made). Nevertheless, if we can recognize that US is capable of state-sponsored terrorism, as it certainly is, then fire-

bombing of cities is manifestly a form of terrorism which in general is defined as “the deliberate slaughter of noncombatants for a political purpose” (the provision “political purpose” underlies the usual distinction that is made between genocides like the Holocaust and strategic bombing.) In other words, terrorism is a tactic to influence people other than those directly attacked or tortured. To call strategic bombing terrorism is accurate but hardly conveys the enormous scale of the attacks and their victims. in which this is practiced.

It occurred to me last night that the accurate description of both strategic bombing and most nuclear war planning would be “genocidal terrorism” or “terrorism on a genocidal scale.” It is a genocide for a political purpose – “genocide” because it is massive and indiscriminate, aiming to deliberately destroy a significant portion of a group on the basis of its nationality – up to the level of extermination—for a political purpose.

Our nuclear plans – on which I worked for several years as high level consultant—are and always have been plans and preparations for genocidal terrorism—terrorism on the scale of genocide; indeed, multi-genocide, deliberately and inevitably annihilating members of multiple ethnic and national groups.

These plans have always entailed a major risk of inadvertent, undesired -- indeed, unforeseen until 1983 but accepted since—risk of homicide or the death of most beings on earth. (In fact a core plan for the unlikely contingency of a Soviet surprise attack which reduces the US ability to retaliate can in these terms can be seen only as pure retaliatory genocide. It cannot really be categorized as terrorism since it does not aim at surrender of the Russians—which is in fact precluded by the deliberate destruction at the onset of all Russian leadership and communications—but simply at the annihilation of as many residents of Russia, or in early times, the Soviet Union as possible up to total extermination.

Judging by reactions to my lectures on this subject, even the relatively informed American public has never understood the role of the deliberate targeting of civilians in British and American war planning and operations in World War II and in nuclear planning since.

The myth which perhaps most people still believe has always been that the targeting has aimed at military targets including war factories or industrial resources but never deliberately at noncombatants. That was not true for the British since 1941 and especially 1942 when deliberate nighttime “area bombing” of residential housing became the main target of the British air war. The US accepted this as the British contribution to allied efforts though it maintained its own doctrine of precision, high level day-light bombing mainly of industrial and military targets until early 1945. However participating in the firestorm on Dresden in February 1945 and a thousand plane raid over Berlin in January which killed 25,000 Berliners, area firebombing became virtually the sole US tactic in Japan beginning with the largest act of terrorism in history, the burning of some 80-120,000 civilians in a firestorm on Tokyo March 9 and 10th 1945. Thereafter,

the same tactic was used on 67 cities in descending order of population with an effort to create a firestorm in each case though it was never again achieved.

Thus the civilians killed in Germany by the RIF and in Japan by the US Army Air Force were not really “collateral damage” nor in any sense undesired or inadvertent accidents of war but were in fact the explicit secret targets of allied bombing. This led to some 600,000 civilian deaths from the bombing in Germany and 800,000 in Japan prior to the atom bombs which added another 300,000. (The 1.7 million civilians deliberately killed mostly by bringing a furnace to their homes and burning them alive is comparable to the number killed at Auschwitz although the criteria in this case was nationality rather than race.

The scale contemplated in our nuclear planning was revealed to me and to President Kennedy by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in May of 1961. We would kill about 600 million people in our first strike or 100 holocausts. This is the apparatus that would have been set off—despite changes in plans that I drafted and Secretary McNamara signed that spring but which would not have been implemented significantly by the next year. This is the apparatus that would have been set off if the Cuban Missile Crisis had led to all-out nuclear war. For reasons I can describe which I studied for most the year in 1964 and given revelations in the half-century since then, we were as close to that as Cuban anti-aircraft was to downing another plane on Saturday, October 27, 1962. That was a distance of several feet since two planes were in fact damaged but not destroyed.

All these reflections began in my mind with Ury’s description of October 27, 1962 – a day I remember vividly, almost minute-by-minute as I lived through it in the Pentagon—as the most dangerous day in the history of human evolution.

It occurred to me that in the early days of WWII providing a context in which the discovery of nuclear fission in 1938 was seen mainly as an instrument of imminent war absolutely necessary to pursue for deterrence and for victory posed a challenge to the human species that it had never ever faced before and which has not to this day has been resolved in a manner that gives us any assurance of survival. To those scientists and some statesmen aware of what the future held in the development of nuclear weaponry there should have been just one overwhelming question from 1938 on: How can this genie be kept in a bottle or returned there? How can the human species and human societies rearrange their institutions, attitudes and behavior so as to avoid realizing the potential of this discovery for our extermination?

The dire possibility was seen from the very beginning when Szilard-- who had already conceived of and patented the concept of a chain reaction—first observed the flashes on a oscilloscope that revealed that uranium atom, split by a neutron would emit two or more neutrons as it fissioned and thus could sustain a chain reaction, he thought to himself, ‘mankind is in for a great deal of grief.’

Four years later when he observed the successful functioning of a nuclear reactor directed by his colleague Enrique Fermi his reaction as the others broke out champagne, that this would go down as a black day for humanity.

It was not until 1945 that Szilard and a few others at the University of Chicago discussed how to contain the dangers that they had helped unleash. Germany had surrendered and their fears that possession of a bomb was necessary and therefore justified to deter German use of such a weapon had vanished. (Germany had no such crash program and in fact never did succeed during the war in making a nuclear reactor function). They concluded that if there was to be any chance of avoiding an unrestricted arms race and moving toward the development thermal nuclear weapons a thousand times greater it would be lost if the US actually tested this weapon in secret and used it against Japan and they recommended against this. US policy never from that day to this reflected such concerns. The countdown to annihilation had begun.

Sunday, December 23, 2007

/nuc book/2nd strike D-L.

In the late Fifties, the clichés among arms controllers and disarmers were “minimum deterrence” and “overkill.” From the time that the Soviets exploded their first H-bomb—often, still, dated as 1953 (which was really a test of a “boosted” fission bomb) or, really, as 1954—it was taken for granted by physicists and others outside the classified weapons community that a successful first strike was infeasible. The only attainable goal of possessing strategic nuclear weapons was to deter their use by threatening unacceptable retaliation. This was a threat easy to make maximally credible, since even one, or several, delivered thermonuclear weapons would be so destructive as to make an attack totally irrational that brought down even a few H-bombs on the attacker in response.

A corollary was that the thousands of warheads possessed by the US were almost entirely redundant. That was true even of a stockpile in hundreds, which would assure almost the total annihilation of the population of the Soviet Union. The hundreds of warheads beyond that would merely “make the rubble bounce,” kill the Soviet population several times over: a pointless waste, whose existence merely testified to the inertia of the production process and of an age-old but obsolete assumption that national strength was an increasing function of destructive power and that you could not have too much of it.

At the RAND Corporation, however, there were two rationales for large strategic forces: both of them within the publicly-declared rationales that nuclear weapons were for deterrence and retaliation. One was Albert Wohlstetter’s emphasis on “second-strike forces,” that part of the arsenal—a small fraction of the peacetime forces—that could be relied on to survive a cleverly-designed and executed Soviet first strike. This was the focus of most RAND analysis from the mid-Fifties through the early Sixties.

(It was entirely illusory, reflecting a strongly-held belief with no foundation in Soviet reality that the Soviets were working on a crash basis to acquire the capability for a disarming first strike against the US. It was exactly as unfounded and misleading as the earlier belief in a German Manhattan Project after 1942, or the later beliefs in an Iraqi WMD program after 1991-94 or an Iranian nuclear weapons program after 2003. Or the transient belief in Congress that the North Vietnamese had attacked American destroyers twice in August 1964).

[How to tell this? Probably by “showing rather than telling.” By describing vividly the anxieties into which I was plunged at RAND in 1958 and 1959. (Though, to motivate the reader to stay with this account, it could be good to do it as a flashback, starting with the discovery that there was no missile gap—or even earlier, with the 325 million estimate—and the reality that there was no crash SU ICBM program in 1961. Irony: my own Gilpatric speech, followed by the/my Ann Arbor (Athens) speech, along with the Turkish IRBMs, motivated that Cuban Missile Crisis: which in turn led to the Brezhnev ICBM buildup, when the JFK-K détente and test ban treaty were aborted with JFK’s

death). But my own speeches reflected the inertial effect on my thinking of Cold War assumptions: how to exploit the end of the missile gap in terms of Berlin, rather than in terms of the possibility of new arms control agreements, ending and reversing the arms race (see Garthoff).

Andy Marshall and Second-strike damage-limiting

In the summer of 1958 and in 1959, my colleagues and I lived with the fear that the Soviets had already or would soon have an ability to disarm the US retaliatory forces with a surprise first strike, but that the US would have no such capability with respect to the Soviets. This was because we believed that the location of the emerging Soviet missile force, and even the location at any given time of the Soviet bomber force was unknown to the Strategic Air Command, making their strategic forces effectively invulnerable to attack, in contrast to our open society. We shared this assumption with outside critics of our nuclear policies (who did not, on the other hand, share our very esoteric belief that our own retaliatory forces were very vulnerable to the Soviets, and thus that the relatively small fraction of our forces that might survive a well-designed Soviet first strike did not represent “overkill,” but might actually be insufficient to deter such an attack).

Outsiders believed in a symmetry of the side being attacked to devastate the attacker in reply. Thus a nuclear attack was irrational under any circumstances, for either. Deterrence was assured, for rational decision-makers; and this was attained by forces much smaller than those possessed by either side. RAND insiders, on the other hand, believed in an asymmetry between the US and Soviet forces, favoring the Soviets: given their closed society and secrecy, they had a potential for an effective first-strike that the US did not have; or to put it another way, they had an assured second-strike capability and the US did not. We saw our task at RAND as achieving, without Soviet-style secrecy, a reliable second-strike capability.

But Andy Marshall introduced me sometime in 1960 to the notion of second-strike damage-limiting capability. At first hearing, this sounded like an oxymoron, self-contradictory, within the framework of assumptions widely shared. How could the side being attacked, striking second, limit in any way the destructive power being launched against it? After all, what would be the use of attacking Soviet missile silos, when the missiles had already been launched? Why destroy empty holes?

But Andy pointed out that space launches were almost invariably delayed by various glitches and unexpected problems. To a large extent, this represented the desire for maximum safety where astronauts were involved; but it was also true for unmanned flights. But Andy revealed to me that the same problems arose when there were tests of operational missile launches. These were conducted at the coastal test sites. (In fact, I believe I recall that as of the early Sixties, there had never been an actual test launch from an operational silo, into the Pacific Test Range: let alone, of course, a launch across the Pole. Nor had there been—perhaps there has never been—a multiple launch from operational silos.) They, too, were invariably delayed from the original launch time, for a variety of reasons.

Andy said: If the Soviets ever gave the order for a simultaneous launch of many missiles (or a timed, phased launch of various volleys, precisely timed from various locations to allow a simultaneous breaching of US radars, or simultaneous arrival on target, to

minimize warning to the US) “a few” missiles would launch exactly on time, or near it. Most would simply still be sitting on their launch pads, or in their silos or submarines, for minutes to hours after the scheduled time. If the US had the ability to move in fast, e.g. with air-launched missiles from strike aircraft on air patrol, they would find a large fraction of pads and silos that were not empty. Destroying these would greatly reduce the destruction from the Soviet attack. Moreover, it would prevent the Soviets from reloading the launchers with reserve missiles.

--Attack command and control: decapitate; delay a Soviet response by hours to days, allowing lots of time for attack.

(In a US first strike: decapitation would prevent the Soviets from reallocating surviving missiles to targets left uncovered by the destruction of some or most of their missiles. Two or more surviving warheads would still be targeted on the same target, or on secondary targets, with primary targets left uncovered.)

--In reality, Andy revealed, Soviet air forces were non-alert, and had not practiced relocation to forward bases or dispersal; thus, they were very vulnerable. (Unlike SAC). (He did not emphasize that this meant a US first strike was feasible. What he drew was that even if they launched a first-strike on a false alarm, it would be possible to reduce their destructive capability by attacking planes that would still be on the ground.

--Eventually, he revealed to me: 1) the meaning of T and K clearances (I first heard from: Cragg?) 2) the existence of the U-2 (or did that just come out with Powers?) (was it in 1962, or 1963, that I was using T and K clearances, at RAND? Note how few had them); 3) the non-existence of the missile gap (before he told us the basis for that) (He referred to Pete ...; we told JFK, but he ignored it)

And I learned: 4) the new SNIE, September, 1961; 5) the Discover series; 6) thus, the facts that the Soviet force was both small and non-alert; 7) we were facing an entirely different “enemy,” both in intent and in capability, than we imagined and feared; in fact, it was not even an “enemy” in the same sense (see Iraq, Iran! Germany with respect to the US, or the ability to win WWII, after 1941-42 (though it was reasonable to fear nucs through mid-1944);

--Thus, into 1964, there was a considerable capability for a US first strike, with little or no damage to the US (see JCS to JFK in 1961; LeMay in 1962) though much greater damage to Europe than we considered at all;

first-strike damage-limiting made sense in that period; after 1964-1965, much less, or not at all: especially, compared to the advantages of limiting offensive capability on both sides, and avoiding war altogether. (That was true earlier, as well, even though a first-strike was not totally devastating to the US as a whole: it might “only” have annihilated New York, Washington or LA! Imagine super-Katrinās for one or all of those! And compare this to the actual threat to us posed by the Soviets! I.e. to the supposed

advantage of eliminating them as a rival or threat (like, now, eliminating Iran by an air attack).

Perhaps what kept the notion of FS alive was”

- a) the possibility of decapitation
- b) the importance of the FU threat in Europe, threat of escalation: to maintaining our role in the NATO alliance, not so much to deterring the Soviets;
- c) maintaining a threat of FS (a belief that we might believe in FS D-L) to maintain a FU threat outside Europe: VN; Iran; Yugoslavia? Japan; South Korea;
- d) the MIC: aerospace industry, electronics; the role of the USAF; the political economy of defense spending, for campaign contributions to presidents and Congress, jobs.

(1964 was 42 years ago).

Note the refusal to negotiate disarmament (as in 1961-62, or earlier 1954 Bulganin) in 1989-91.

And the maintenance of the FU threat in 1992-9... to “prevent or deter WMDs”—which meant, I suspect, Iraqi CW/BW and nucs (which, instead, inspection stopped in 1991-94!); or against Iranian underground sites (nuc program stopping in 2003; was it ever underground? Where and what was it? That would be good for Iranians to answer! Or: would that stop Bush from attacking, or just give him targets? If Bush doesn’t attack, Iran should certainly answer this no later than 2009!)

To return: Andy revealed, sequentially: We do know where their planes and missiles are; (eventually: how we knew); they are non-alert; they are few.

Thus, “if war does occur” there is an answer to his question: “What should we do with our forces?” We should use them, quickly, to attack the planes and missiles still on the ground, even if the Soviets have already launched some. And this will markedly reduce his destructive capability, since his forces are small altogether (it will reduce a small attack force even more).

(Meanwhile, HK was pushing CD shelters. AJW was pushing bomber shelters (unnecessary), and missile silos (good, but misdirected: unnecessary); and PAL (good); and survivable C3; while SAC was using his analyses to push air alert (first-strike, and accident-prone); WWK pushing recon-strike, B-70, as answer to Polaris; navy preparing accurate Polaris and Poseidon; I pushing reserve forces, PAL; Hoag and MHH, NFU

Meanwhile, what the USAF/SAC/JCS had been pushing all along. (Helped by Khrushchev’s bluffs!)

What we feared, at RAND.

What the reality was: in the SU; in USAF; in terms of plans, intent. In the White House, Establishment, MIC.

What the real dangers were, in the actually-existing systems.

What the revealed values were: ferocity, ruthlessness, recklessness, greed, power-drive...

What might have happened in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

What might have happened in Vietnam: JCS approach; Khe Sanh/1968; Nixon.

What the possibilities were for a reversal: Szilard/Rabinowittz; Bulganin/Khrushchev; Lilienthal/Oppenheimer/Conant/Bethe/Bundy H-bomb; JFK 1961; JFK 1962-63; Gilpatric Committee; desires of NNWS in 1968 and beyond; Gorbachev (Reagan); 1990...

Real US attitudes toward proliferation. (Eisenhower and Atoms for Peace; Israel, JFK and LBJ and Nixon; Rusk: India, Japan, Germany; NLF. LBJ/RFK/Gilpatric. Pakistan (SU testing; Afghanistan; Al Qaeda). Bush and North Korea/Iraq. Rejection of MP-II, 1995, 2000. Bush 2002, 2005. Iraq, Iran, NK.... Probable emergence of true "delicate balances."

Possibilities for cooperation given a nuclear terrorist attack, police states in the US and elsewhere, testing and global proliferation. Global rivalries over water and oil, refugee flows from environmental disasters and famines.

\hist\and\auto\my nucsto.ry
August 25, 1995

Plan for fall writing:

Nearly everything written about the role of nuclear weapons, deterrence, plans, etc. has been nonsense, and largely irrelevant: as badly misdirected as most accounts of the Hiroshima "decision."

That's because, in part, none of these writers have had the particular experience and information that I had: precisely at a time when the US had a near-monopoly of strategic force. And my experience spanned the period when the US did not know--or pretended not to know--that it had such a monopoly, and the succeeding period when the President knew this very well, but in no appropriate way acted on this information. (Nor did any one else, including me).

I was just saying to Patricia: even now, no one writing about these subjects would share my perspective...except for those actually working on war plans and operations. "And people who get access to these plans don't see anything wrong with them...don't see how crazy they are."

Having said that, the question occurred to me: Why is this? After all, some of these people--Walt Slocum, others--are very intelligent? Why can't they see that strategies that seemed appropriate to me in a very different period and context became obviously insane in the world as it evolved just a few years later?

An answer occurred to me, for the first time: all those people were introduced to the plans in a period when the Soviets, imitating us after 1964, had built up their force to the same crazy levels as ours, and were imitating our counterforce capabilities. Nor were they tempted to believe that the Brezhnev buildup and posture could be easily stopped or reversed. So they were looking at a force that seemed to rationalise our own and our plans, despite the joint craziness of the programs (as in Prisoner's Dilemma?).

I, on the other hand, began by seeing the "balance" as it actually later became, i.e., as if the world Slocum et al confronted had already existed in 1958-61. That is why these strategies seemed relevant, though desperate and obviously dangerous, to me at the time, and to all my colleagues. (The meaning of these strategies was different to Air Force officers who had a better knowledge of Soviet weakness and vulnerability; they understood that these plans were oriented to first-strike, not to deterrence of nuclear attack).

But in September 1961 I became aware--long before any of my RAND colleagues--that the real world was entirely different from what we had been told and believed. The difference was as great as the world of Europe and the Warsaw Pact before 1989-91 and after. It was like two different planets.

And did I suggest then that we should reexamine all our assumptions, concepts, plans, in light of this new world? The possibilities for a test ban, for radical arms control? No, I did not; nor

did any other official or consultant.

My own first reaction was: How does this bear on our immediate crisis, the Berlin Crisis? Khrushchev was threatening to turn over access to Berlin to East Germany in December, just two months away. He had no missiles at all! (to be precise, four). He couldn't possibly face down the US; he was bluffing! (He had clearly been lying to us and the world about his ICBM production). So I embarked on a campaign to call his bluff. And I eventually succeeded in doing so; and two days after Gilpatric delivered my speech exposing the true missile gap in our favor, Khrushchev dropped his commitment to signing a peace treaty with East Germany that year. The Berlin Crisis was over. My speech had ended it.

As I told Patricia: I felt pretty good about that. Unfortunately--I didn't know it till years later--my speech, exposing his bluff and humiliating him, as well as revealing the strategic consequences of the missile imbalance, impelled Khrushchev to try to even the playing field as fast as he could. The only way he could do that quickly was by secretly transporting some intermediate and medium range missiles to within range of the US: in Cuba

[Burlesque routine: "That's bad."

"No, that was good; we won a great victory in the Cuban Crisis."

"That's good."

"No, that was bad. Partly as a result of this humiliation, Khrushchev was replaced by Brezhnev, who promised the military, for their support, that they would never be in that position again; that led to a twenty-five year nuclear buildup in the SU, and thus on both sides."

"That's bad."

"No, that was good [according to Reagan]. It bankrupted the Soviet Union and led to the ending to the ending of the Cold War, the breakup of the Soviet Empire and the downfall of Communism."

"That's good."

"No, that was bad. Now we have war in former Yugoslavia, we may have civil war in Russia, and the Mafia running Russia may allow nuclear weapons to leak out to all sides. And a fascist government in Russia will continue to have enough nuclear weapons to destroy life on earth, as will we."

"That's bad."

"Yes, that's bad."]

But by late October, the Berlin Crisis appeared to be over. Why didn't we--why didn't I, why didn't anyone--say then: OK, now let's look at everything anew, from the bottom? (A "Bottom Up Review"). Maybe we have totally underrated the possibilities of far-reaching arms control, nuclear disarmament! Is there some way we could keep the Soviets down to four ICBMs, or even get those dismantled? After all, Khrushchev has only built four,, after all, without any agreement limiting ours. Isn't it possible that an agreement limiting ours as well could keep a lid on his, or even eliminate them?

Why isn't a test ban feasible? And a test ban on missile tests!

Yet as Ray Garthoff has reported--about a group, for which he was the rapporteur, assigned to assess the significance of the new intelligence for our strategic programs--the only question they looked at was: In the light of these new findings, are our programs adequate?

Needless to say, our programs projecting a minimum of 1000 Minutemen looked "adequate." How could they have looked otherwise? Why did this question need to be addressed at all?!

Yet that was really the only question they looked at. Not: might our programs be a little excessive? They have four, we need 1000? How could that have made sense to anyone?

Pat: Well, that's the US reaction to the new situation, now. Sure: and for basically the same reasons: we don't want to give up the "superiority" (in this case, to the rest of the world), or the force structure, or the jobs, production, profits. JFK wanted to build 1000 missiles starting in the fall of 1961, for domestic economic reasons.

"He wouldn't give it up for the world." (As Mort Sahl quoted Ike as saying about letting John Foster Dulles go. Sahl's comment: "At least he knows what the stakes are.")

But then I thought of another new question, and a new answer. How could Tom Schelling and Mort Halperin, who were just initiating the analytical field of arms control, have failed to see these possibilities? Answer: They didn't know, in vivid, precise, concrete terms, the extent of the shift in "reality." They didn't know the new estimates, or how reliably they were based. Like my listeners at my RAND briefing, even if they had been told the new estimate they probably wouldn't have believed it, or at least, really absorbed it. Like RAND, they went on living in the old world for several years--till it had changed decisively, to become more like the former, illusory perception.

(Recall that RAND thinking, in particular, had become frozen, as in amber, at the 1958 estimate of the missile gap, the last one they saw. In 1959 and 1960 and 1961, as the estimates began presenting dissenting footnotes, RAND perceptions still reflected the 1958 estimates of the impending gap, the largest gaps of all.)

[Note that people at different clearance levels live in different realities, different worlds of information. Thus, histories of the Cuban Missile Crisis, or the arms race [me versus nearly

every one else]; even JFK's outdated perceptions just before the Cuban Missile Crisis.]

Even people who learned, at one point or another, that there was no missile gap favoring the Soviets, but were led to believe--as was generally true for 10-20 years (and Rhodes said it again this year)--that the Soviets had "only 50" ICBMs in 1961, did not at all grasp the nature of the changed perception of reality.

A belief that the Russians had 50 missiles would not have raised any questions about the premises of our worldview or about the nature of Soviet aims and the possibilities of negotiation. That would have suggested that no fundamental changes were called for in our conceptual framework. The Soviets had simply been less successful in pursuing their goals than our worst-case conjectures had projected. So Halperin and Schelling (check this with them) would not have been led to imagine wholly different possibilities for concerting US-SU programs that were conceivable in 1959.

As for what I could have done: in reflecting on what McNamara should have done when he realized, no later than 1965 or 66, that his earlier hopes were unfounded, I realized this summer: I could have put out the war plans.

To be sure, that never occurred to me. I did imagine informing Congress, but since it was in the grip of Richard Russell, Strom Thurmond and such types, there didn't seem any promise in that. And the New York Times would not have been quick to print such things in 1961; in fact, they almost surely would not have done so.

And--Pat points out--I would certainly have gone to prison. She says: "You probably would have been executed." No: I could probably have done it in a way that would have avoided a conviction for treason (?). Anyway, we weren't at war. But prison, yes. The stakes looked as high to me, even then, as in Vietnam; in fact, obviously higher. I could have done it, if I had thought of it and if I could have found a way to get them out effectively. I think they would have made a major difference.

Pat: that's a heavy load to bear. Yes: but the same as with Vietnam, what I could have done in 1964-65. I just didn't think of it (unlike Rabinowitch, in 1945; and he had little reason to imagine that he would have made a difference, though in fact he might have--via the Japanese, who were more ready to sue for peace than he knew).

Sunday, January 14, 2007
Nuclear book/my story

--The piece of paper. (see Secrets).

In the late spring of 1961, the first year of the Kennedy administration, I wrote a question that was sent from the White House to the JCS—the Joint Chiefs of Staff --in the name of President Kennedy. How I came to be in a position to do this and what led up to it is a story I'll tell later. The question concerned the current JCS operational plan for general nuclear war. It was...

It was my impression that the JCS did not have a ready answer to this question. One would normally have expected them to, of course. But I was unusually knowledgeable at that time about the plans and the planning process for nuclear war, and two colonels who were at the heart of that process in the Air Staff had each told me that they didn't believe the Joint Staff had ever calculated the full human casualties to be expected from carrying out their operational plan.

The plan at that time was in essence very simple. It called for attacking, under any of the circumstances that might lead to general nuclear war, a single, very large target system throughout the "Sino-Soviet Bloc." There were no real alternatives among plans, no high-level choices to be made about the nature of the attack. What were called "attack options" simply related to the number and deployment of the alert and follow-up bombers that were available at the onset, which depended mainly on the number of hours of warning or alerting of the forces before the commencement of execution.

In what the JCS regarded as the unlikely event of a Soviet surprise attack --in great contrast to the public's impression, JCS planning documents described this as the least likely way that general war might commence--there would be fewer forces available for a retaliatory attack. Only a smaller, core subset of the full target system would be attacked, mainly by the strategic and tactical bombers on ten-minute alert strip alert on bases around the world. If the presumed Soviet missile attack was ragged--much less than simultaneous, because of operational failures--the first explosions would give more warning time for some bases not yet hit than the minutes (less than twenty) provided by our radar and infrared warning systems. Then more planes could get off the ground and more of the targets could be hit.

But the planning assumed that it was far more likely that there would be ample time to alert all the forces and to get them all off, in waves, because general war would be preceded by a non-nuclear conflict that moved only gradually to a level where the president decided to execute the general war plan. By directive of President Eisenhower --planning that remained in effect in early 1961-- that point would be reached when armed forces of the Soviet Union--of a scale indicating a deliberate high-level Soviet decision, something between a brigade and a division--entered into conflict with forces of the United States.

The most obvious place where this might come about on the supply routes to West Berlin, a Western enclave in the heart of Soviet-dominated East Germany. There were twenty-two Soviet divisions in East Germany at that time, many in the vicinity of Berlin. Although NATO had large conventional forces, and it was the intention of the Kennedy Administration to improve their capability to defend Western Europe as a whole, neither the U.S. nor its allies could ever hope to punch through Soviet divisions to rescue West Berlin from an occupation or even from a blockade by East German forces supported by Soviets. Resupply by an airlift, as had been carried out in 1948 during the Berlin Blockade which could be said to have been the first confrontation of the Cold War, was feasible only if the Soviets refrained from shooting down the transports. The threat of nuclear war had kept them from doing that in 1948—Truman had ostentatiously moved a squadron of B-29's, nuclear-capable bombers—to England for the first time during that crisis. Nothing other than that threat could assure Western access to Berlin for the remainder of the Cold War.

In 1958, in an effort to force the West to recognize the East German regime and the permanent division of Germany, and also to warn the U.S. against giving nuclear weapons to West Germany, Khrushchev renewed threats to turn over control of access to West Berlin to the East Germans, who would then be free to block access, backed up by Soviet forces. A new Berlin Crisis had commenced. It was to heat up in June, 1961, when Khrushchev told Kennedy in a summit meeting in Vienna that he would grant the East Germans control of the routes to Berlin by the end of the year. This was a month or so after the president had posed my question to the JCS.

I was aware at that time of planning going on in the Pentagon, under Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Paul Nitze (my base in the Pentagon as a consultant from the Rand Corporation), for possible responses to a Soviet/East German blockage. They involved a progression of moves by U.S. units starting with a platoon and moving through a battalion or so, to indicate U.S. determination and to probe Soviet intentions. But the decision to move to nuclear war would be very close after that, unless West Berlin were to be abandoned, which was regarded as unthinkable, the downfall of the Western alliance.

Eisenhower's planning precluded the option at that point of "limited" nuclear war involving only the tactical—short-range-- nuclear weapons we had deployed in large numbers in West Europe on bombers, short-range missiles and artillery pieces. He assumed, plausibly, that such a war against Soviet forces would inevitably escalate quickly to all-out nuclear war, and that it would be preferable to strike first in an all-out strike aimed at disarming Soviet nuclear and other military forces at the outset, rather than to risk letting the Soviets get in the first nuclear blow.

--The accident. The trip up to the accident. (How much do I explain Mother's depression? Just briefly? Mention the end of my piano career? Thus, my feeling that "I owe a life"? "Now I don't have to [live a life of disappointment to my mother; I'm free: till I pay my debt"? Or leave this till later: or out, in this book: tell the whole story as a New Yorker story?)

The role of Dad, Mother, Gloria. Gambling; obedience to authority. The need to watch a leader, in case he risks losing control, goes to sleep at the wheel, goes off the road, sacrifices lives. Or put this after the Uranium Bomb.

--Looking back at my life, I think this was conflated with something that happened a year earlier. It started about eight months before that. In the ninth grade, in the fall of 1944...

--My relation to bombing. Warsaw, strafing refugees in Poland and France, the Blitz. Magnesium firebombs (see Secrets). Dad and Willow Run and the Dodge Chicago plant (also for bombers?)

Doomsday Machine notes
1-14-04

Herman Kahn, my onetime pal at the Rand Corporation, invented the concept of the Doomsday Machine: a system rigged to destroy all life on earth, known to be triggered automatically by the occurrence of some event on a published menu of actions meant to be deterred, such as one or several nuclear explosions on US territory. He claimed to have suggested it only to show that deterrence alone wasn't an adequate criterion for our nuclear weapons systems. If all other considerations were neglected, except cost, you could be led to an extreme solution where, he originally supposed, no reasonable person would want to go.

Various forms of Doomsday Machines, he conjectured from his background as an applied physicist, would be both feasible and easily affordable, and they would surely maximize deterrence of the proscribed actions. But they were "obviously"—he thought initially-- unacceptable on a number of grounds: too automatic, lacking in human control or override (which was what made them maximally "credible" as deterrents, but, he presumed, at an unacceptable risk), too liable to false alarms, and excessively, irreversibly destructive. Obvious as this seemed to him, Herman had to acknowledge that when he tried this "thought experiment" out on many of his colleagues, a few of his engineering friends were quite taken with the idea, and started making preliminary design calculations.ⁱ

But alone at Rand, so far as I knew, I discovered soon after this that the United States had already constructed something very close to Herman's conceptual machine. In fact, for reasons no one knew at the time, what the Air Force and Navy under President Eisenhower had installed and were operating *was*, not by design but inadvertently, a Doomsday Machine, in the most literal sense. Any one of a number of events—a nuclear explosion on Washington was just one of these—would have triggered with virtual certainty thousands of thermonuclear explosions elsewhere, mostly on or near cities.

That much was planned, at one level or another, though not comprehended or intended at any one seat of authority so far as I could tell; I suspected no one understood both the target system and the degree of automaticity. The immediate result would be to kill, by blast and fire and fallout, more than half a billion people. But other effects, never calculated nor understood for another quarter of a century, could have led to the extermination of all humans and large animals and most forms of life on Earth except for certain grasses, cockroaches, flies, mosquitoes and bacteria.

END NOTES

ⁱ [That wasn't just one of his jokes. I found myself reading a Rand "P," (for Paper) a blue-covered document meant for unclassified distribution, by one of his disciples entitled "The Design of a Domsday Machine." It sketched out nine or ten ways one might destroy all or most life on earth, some of them by harnessing the energy of large thermonuclear explosions to produce environmental or ecological catastrophes, such as a giant tidal wave, or by seeding the explosives with long-lived radioactive poisons like the cobalt bombs of "On the Beach."

It was the first time I'd seen at Rand a study that I didn't think should have been done at all, by anyone anywhere, it shouldn't exist. But I was especially shocked that a colleague would think of distributing this as an unclassified paper. (Nearly everything we wrote at Rand, except for the Social Science division and professional papers people wrote on the side in their academic specialties, was classified, mostly "Secret"). This I thought should be Top Secret, if it were to exist at all, which meant it would have very limited distribution even at Rand, though we all had Top Secret clearances. But my colleague was adamant against classifying it; he insisted all of his calculations had been made from open sources. I thought he was crazy, and told him so.]

Page 129 November 1985

Notes on the legitimacy of nuclear threats and warfare.

-The public's lack of mobilization on the nuclear issue adequate to overthrowing a Presidential and Establishment policy reflects, in part, the belief that nuclear war will not happen, cannot happen: because deliberately starting a nuclear war is, after all, unthinkable. And that, in turn, because doing it, or even thinking about actually doing it, is illegitimate.

Unthinkable, why? Because it would be suicidal. (Though suicide is not exactly uncommon; thinking about it, still less! But this would be mass, universal suicide. Well?) Or at any rate, monumentally imprudent, reckless, an unacceptable risk of total catastrophe.

Prudence and legitimacy are bound together here. One is permitted to take high risks for oneself—it is legitimate to do it (e.g., in certain sports, or in war, in gambling, in business—even though it would not be prudent or even seem reasonable to do so. But when these risks involve other potential victims (e.g., when investing someone else's money; or a physical catastrophe may engulf others) what is not prudent may be forbidden, illegitimate, wrong. It is "not to be thought of." And if the scale of the risk is high enough, it may not be permitted even for oneself. Thus, suicide is widely ruled to be illegal and wrong (barring one from burial in a Catholic graveyard, for example).

But would use of nuclear weapons always be suicidal, or involve a high risk of suicide or universal catastrophe? Using them against an opponent that did not possess nuclear weapons, and did not have a clear commitment of nuclear support from an ally, would not clearly involve such a risk. But that too is "unthinkable," simply illegitimate for reasons other than prudence. It would be—it is thought—unjustifiable, unforgivable bullying, impossible for the US to consider or do. (See Michael Walzer on Just War). It would be disproportionate, even used against military targets; such a country could not pose such a threat to the US or its forces as to justify such destruction. Used against civilians, it would be indiscriminate slaughter, a war crime (no more so than conventional strategic bombing, but on a larger scale, and with a greater risk of further escalation).

But is that not exactly what the US did to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945? Answer: That is to be explained, if not justified, by the preceding four years of world war, starting for the US with Pearl Harbor. And it was justified by the context, that there was no alternative way to end the war except by sacrificing a million Americans (and killing even more Japanese); so the use of the bomb was a vastly lesser evil. (This argument purports to meet comprehensive and demanding criteria for justifying the undertaking of a lesser evil; though many of the

Page 2 premises happen to be false).

One use of nuclear weapons is widely regarded as legitimate: retaliating in kind to a nuclear attack on one's own country. (The Catholic bishops have rejected even this if retaliating "in kind" involved direct attacks on cities. But most Americans, including probably most Catholics, currently disagree; and disagree even more when it comes to threatening such retaliation, a threat which they regard as both justified and having no adequate substitute). Thus, preparing and threatening such retaliation is seen as unquestionably legitimate, even obligatory for the US. Of course, such capabilities carry with them the ability to threaten or attack non-nuclear countries. And, with great risk, the ability to do so to nuclear antagonists as well: a threat and readiness that is explicit, for example, in the case of the defense of NATO.

"Insiders" in the bureaucracy controlling nuclear weapons have always seen another use for them as well: "limiting damage" and achieving a military/political outcome better than the worst possible, "in case deterrence fails": in the event that a nuclear war occurs for whatever reason. Use against military targets, and in particular the "decapitation" of the enemy command and control system, along with the destruction of the industrial, "war-supporting" base, has always been thought to be instrumental to achieving military objectives in nuclear war. The first two of these tasks are highly "time-urgent"; they must be carried out before most or any of the enemy forces have left enemy bases. There is an enormous premium in striking the first blow, "preemptively." (And preparation even to carry out these tasks "second," as "second-strike damage-limiting," is virtually indistinguishable, in appearance and readiness, from preparation to preempt. Even a high alert state for counterforce forces, needed for second-strike damage-limiting, serves to reduce tactical warning to the opponent of one's preemption).

This readiness to "limit damage," which is likely to be and at any rate to appear as readiness to preempt, in turn reinforces the credibility of threats to initiate strategic nuclear warfare, as an escalation of conflict with a strategically armed nuclear opponent, if that opponent is also equipped with the ability to escalate or preempt. After all, the circumstances in which one would rely on such a threat and would want it to be credible would almost surely involve some apprehension that such an opponent would itself escalate or preempt, so that damage-limiting capabilities would appear relevant, and an incentive to get in the first blow. This effect on the credibility of threats undergirding "extended deterrence" (detering actions other than a nuclear attack on the US, protecting US interests overseas) could even be the main purpose of efforts to achieve wartime damage-limiting, efforts which no longer offer high promise of being effective in the event of actual nuclear war. (See Star Wars; and the op ed connecting it with the threat of preemption by Forney Stark and Greg Weaver in the Oakland Tribune, November 8, 1985:

Page 3 almost the only instance in print of "my" argument by someone else.)

Is it legitimate to threaten, and thus to prepare, what it is not legitimate to do? Catholic doctrine says "no"; but most Americans clearly believe "yes," where the circumstances are sufficiently pressing and the alternatives inadequate. And most of them recognize that threats and preparations carry some risk of being eventually implemented—even irrationally, illegitimately, without authoritative decision—just by virtue of their existence, in the heat of a crisis, even though their existence was justified only in terms of pure bluffing. That is probably the basis of Americans' residual apprehension about nuclear war, along with fear of initiation by "Qaddafi" or other new nuclear leaders "less inhibited than either US or Soviet leaders by considerations of morality (US) or prudence (US and Soviet)."

The risks of nuclear war have always seemed to me greater, the pathways to nuclear war more numerous and less obstructed, than they appeared to most members of the American public and to elites, because I have been more aware of the role that nuclear threats have played in our foreign policy, of the nature of our readiness and preparations to carry them out, and above all, of the difference between the Insiders' and the public's appreciation of both the risks and the legitimacy of carrying out these threats.

World War II strategic bombing decisively changed the attitudes of top civilian and military officials toward the legitimacy of direct attacks upon civilians or of large-scale "collateral damage" to civilians in the course of attacks on military targets: toward what Lewis Mumford called, "The Morals of Extinction" (Atlantic, 1960?). This experience, and their sense that it was justified (and at least in the case of Japan, effective; and that it could have been effective in Germany, with better targeting, and certainly with atomic weapons) wiped out in their minds the moral relevance of the distinction between military and civilian targets and the traditional prohibition against indiscriminate or deliberate destruction of "innocents." This left prudential but no longer legitimacy barriers to the consideration of actual (as well as threatened) initiation of nuclear war.

The public (as polls have recently indicated) has endorsed threats to initiate—at least for certain high-stakes cases, mainly the defense of Europe—and therefore, preparations that make these threats credible (and even, lack of preparations for alternatives: especially applauded by European governments) but regards the carrying out of such threats, if they failed to deter, as intolerably reckless and even questionably legitimate. But officials administering this policy have always included some who regarded carrying out these threats as less reckless, more effective, more prudent compared to alternatives, than the public believed or could even imagine that anyone believed, and as unquestionably legitimate, "for reasons of state."

Page 4 Systems analysts often regard questions of "legitimacy" as irrelevant if not meaningless, but in any case foreign to the consideration of "rational choice," or the calculated pursuit of interest. But this betrays a "Robinson Crusoe" orientation: i.e., the perspective of a single human decision-maker, whose values are assumed fixed and known, without subordinates, superiors or a constituency, without allies or adversaries. When more realistic complexity of structure is recognized, the category of "legitimacy"—what is permitted, or forbidden, to be considered or chosen, on grounds of morality, legality, character/integrity—can be discovered to be highly relevant to prudential concerns,

in particular the avoidance of disaster.

When one recognizes the possibility that officials may take actions against the desires and interests of their superiors or of their constituents, one sees an interest in reducing this risk. There is a potential price to doing this by placing certain actions entirely outside bounds, by forbidding them under any circumstances, declaring them "criminal" or immoral, not to be considered; the price, or risk, is that these actions will not be considered in circumstances when they would, after all (perhaps unforeseeably) serve all the relevant interests better than any alternatives, when they would constitute a "lesser evil." [Thus, precisely those systems analysts at RAND who, as economists, were devotees of pure competition and the free market, were strongly biased against proscriptions that might ban what would otherwise be the "optimal" choice. The pure competition model, though apparently social, actually shares many characteristics with the Robinson Crusoe model.]

But where catastrophic errors are possible, there is a strong case for erecting as many barriers to it as possible: and authoritative judgments of immorality or illegality, "violations of integrity or fundamental identity or group membership" that effectively exclude the potentially catastrophic choice from consciousness or active consideration as an "option" are the most powerful barriers possible. This is especially true—compared to relying on the perceived imprudence or dangerous consequences of such an option rationally compared to alternatives—under urgent, desperate crisis circumstances when judgments of consequences and the practicality of alternatives may be highly erratic, almost random, or warped by fear and other emotions. Better, as an assurance that a possibly catastrophic course will not be chosen, that it not be physically available or feasible at all: i.e., that no preparations have been made for it, because even the threat of it has been ruled out as impermissible. And if it is, nevertheless, "objectively" feasible, better that it not be thought of, discussed, weighed and considered, at all: because it is "unthinkable." (Does Herman Kahn, in "Thinking About the Unthinkable," or elsewhere, ever lay out the reasons systematically for not doing so: i.e., for allowing and using the category of "Unthinkable"?)

Thursday, February 03, 2005

Why nuclear war is highly likely; and why efforts to avoid it are not only very difficult but are likely to fail.

The basis for pessimism and “cynicism”: given our present military technology, posture and doctrines (especially in the US and Russia, but also in all the present and *potential* (“latent”) nuclear weapons states) the high probability of nuclear weapons use and the difficulty and unlikelihood of successful efforts to avert this, rest on little-recognized and problematic (largely unadmirable, deplorable in their actual effects, though to some degree functional in certain circumstances) aspects of “human nature”: inclinations and characteristics including phenomena of conscience, morality, religion, loyalties obedience and personal self-sacrifice that are generally very highly regarded, rewarded and admired. In existing circumstances, it is in part these aspects of our “better nature,” our “highest selves” that lead us toward doom, and make it close to impossible to change course.

Our own country leads the way, and (with Britain) has done so for over sixty years. That has been true since about 1942 (with Germany’s blitz of London essentially over, succeeded by US and British area bombing, and the start of the Manhattan Project).

Global change is needed, and the full participation (and probably leadership, unlikely as that is) of the US is essential to this change. But the US has always been and under this administration remains the single greatest opponent of the necessary changes in attitudes directly relating to nuclear war. (The Soviet Union, especially during the Brezhnev period, was a sturdy partner in this opposition.)

3/3/2005 3:33 PM

\nuc book\me and Bomb(s)

1940: Battle of Britain: Blitz. Magnesium bombs.

1943-44: Dad and bomber plants

1944: class assignment

1945: Hiroshima

1954: Dienbienphu (Ike nuclear offer to France): I'm at OCs.

1956: Suez: I'm there.

(Bulganin/Khrushchev nuclear threats)

(French start helping Israel! See Critical Mass 298)

(1958: **Iraq vs. Kuwait**: Ike nuclear threats: I learn by 1981)

1958-62

1961: I read Owen memo to JFK on France, XXX;

1961: fall: SNIE; RAND briefing; Berlin Game; JFK on CD; Gilpatric speech (first for JFK); K speech;

1962: Athens speech; Ann Arbor speech; BNSP (WWR); JSCP.
Cuba-II; Turkish missiles.

1963, morning of JFK assassination, **I read McG B memo on JFK decision to help France at test site. XXX (see my reaction)**

1964: study of nuclear crises. **MHH study of 1958 Quemoy crisis**. Neustadt on Skybolt. (de Gaulle decides to have independent force?)

Chinese test, October 16 (K falls: Brezhnev promises to achieve parity). **ISA discussion of help to India; Rusk, McNamara; Gilpatric Committee and Report.**

Consideration of attack on China by hsr; by McNamara, with JCS (Chinese test of droppable bomb not till May, 1965).

[Note that we helped: UK; India; France; Israel; Pakistan; Iran (under Shah); Iraq(under Saddam); South Africa?

French helped: Israel; India; Iraq; South Africa

Occasions when nuclear bombs could have fallen into hands of rebels: (Critical Mass):
Algeria 1961; China 1967; Iran 1979 and Saddam (1991) change from friends to foes;
Russia 1991; Pakistan, could switch any day;
Atoms for Peace...

Countries use threats of massive annihilation to deter or prevent, not dangers of genocide but dangers of “national extinction”: being overrun, occupied. But what they threaten is genocide. And these threats and preparations can lead to real extinction: first, of “Northern” (not just Western) civilization, a culture of cities. And possibly, near-extinction of species: the first species to extinguish itself (along with others, many others). Eventual result: full extinction, thousands to millions of years before the “average life cycle” of a species would be ended by changes in environment external to itself.

(Will any complex animal have had as short a life term as a species, except—also!—as human hands?! Or will all the other animals we wiped out have lasted longer than we will, before we finished them and by the time we finish ourselves?

Humans: the killer ape. The Exterminator. The Rise and Fall of Civilization.

c:\nucs\c3.60
9 August 1989

Comments on my August 1960 paper, Strategic Objectives and Command Control Problems, Rand D-7838

--Note: This was written during my and RAND's "missile gap" concern; though it was about the time that Andy Marshall had begun to hint to me and a few others (including an advisory group for Kennedy's campaign) that "there might be no missile gap after all." (He could give us no reasons for this prediction, which ran totally counter to the assumptions of RAND and USAF studies).

--This was written after my work for CINCPAC and my reading of the war plans--including, I presume, the JSCP, though I'm not certain of that at this moment. Yet the definition of "general war" on p. 14--"the all-out struggle to the finish between the United States and the USSR"--reflects the general understanding of that term, not the highly secret definition in the JSCP: "armed conflict between the US and the USSR," which deliberately excluded the notion of limited war with the Soviet Union or any strategy in such a conflict other than the immediate execution of what came to be called the SIOP. (I may simply have been keeping the secret--especially in this unclassified D--of this latter definition, which it was my goal to bring to the attention of the Secretary of Defense and the President).

--p. 19. The JSCP and SIOP-62 that ruled at the outset of the Kennedy Administration were indeed designed to operate "on the principle of the mousetrap; given certain preselected triggering signals, a predetermined, inexorable response would follow fast and automatically (without "feedback control")."

This mousetrap was designed and expected to kill promptly some 600 million people.

Perhaps more than I appreciated at the time, this design may have reflected a tacit understanding by the JCS and SAC Commanders of the vulnerability of command centers and communications, and thus the near-impossibility of either centralized or decentralized post-attack control.

Another factor that I didn't fully recognize at the time was the degree to which General LeMay and his disciples felt post-attack control was unnecessary, in view of their belief that a single target system was optimal under all circumstances, both for deterrence, retaliation and war-fighting.

That is, it was not till I saw the continuous lineage of the 1959-60 plans from the World War II attacks on Japan through the nuclear plans of the late '40's (before there was any threat of Soviet nuclear attack) and the early '50's, when the threat of Soviet attack was still minimal, that I fully realized that, to

LeMay, Soviet cities were suitable and critical first-strike targets.

Moreover, they were suitable "prompt" targets for the first wave of attack, along with Soviet nuclear bases and other military targets. The desirability of attacking them immediately was reinforced by the above consideration, that any Soviet retaliation at all was likely to eliminate US command and control. Third, any delay in attacking them could tempt a US President, if he were still alive, to decide against attacking them at all: eliminating what LeMay saw as a crucial part of a war-winning strategy. Fourth, Moscow in particular was the center of the Soviet command and control system, which LeMay sought to destroy at the outset.

Preserving Soviet command and control in hopes of bringing about an end of the war--without full expenditure of Soviet forces--held no advantages to the JCS or SAC, in their knowledge--not shared with RAND or me (or the President)--that Soviet forces were so small even before US attack, and so vulnerable, that this "coercive option" which I prescribed in my draft guidelines in 1961 was not a compelling strategy for dealing with any Soviet residual forces. (My coercive strategy presumed that fairly large, relatively invulnerable Soviet forces were to be expected to survive the first nuclear exchange; this was the implication of official CIA/USAF intelligence estimates).

Thus the only military objective in general war (in the usual, non-JSCP sense) was to destroy as promptly as possible a fixed target system, which played the role, in effect, of the mouse. LeMay was the exterminator of the mouse,

<http://www.reason.com>
<http://www.reason.com/news/show/126913.html>



Why I Did It!

An interview with Daniel Ellsberg concerning government security, government hypocrisy, and the pentagon papers

Manuel Klausner and Henry Hohenstein | June 1973 Print Edition

On Thursday Evening, February 15, 1973, REASON editor Manuel S. Klausner and Hank Hohenstein travelled to the Ellsberg- Russo Defense Headquarters, to interview Daniel Ellsberg of the now famous Pentagon Papers case, which is still in trial in federal court in Los Angeles as we go to press.

Dr. Ellsberg was indicted June 25, 1971 for his activities in making the Pentagon Papers public. His effort to publicize the Pentagon Papers began in September 1969 with an attempt to have the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hold hearings on the matter. Not meeting with success in the Congress, he turned to the press and in June 1971 the NEW YORK TIMES and other newspapers began to publish excerpts from the papers. In December 1971 a superseding fifteen count indictment was issued which additionally named Anthony J. Russo, a RAND colleague, as codefendant. The major statutes involved in the charges are: espionage, theft of government property, and conspiracy.

Dr. Ellsberg, born in Chicago in 1931, received his degree in economics with highest honors from Harvard College in 1952, followed by a year at Cambridge. He then enlisted in the Marine Corps, served as a rifle company commander and participated in the Mediterranean during the Suez crisis. He graduated number one in his class of 1,100 newly commissioned Second Lieutenants at Basic School, Quantico, Virginia. And, as Hank Hohenstein (also a former Marine) has observed, "Anyone can graduate with highest honors from Harvard, but it takes a very unique person to be number one among officers of Marines."

After leaving the Marines, Dr. Ellsberg returned to Harvard University to become a member of the Society of Fellows and to receive his Ph.D. in economics in 1962. Also during this time he was a strategic analyst at RAND Corporation and a consultant to the Department of Defense. During this period he participated in numerous studies, and was on the Executive Committee of the National Security Council during the Cuban missile crisis. He went to Vietnam in 1965 for the State Department and served on General Lansdale's senior liaison team. He then was transferred to become a Special Assistant to Deputy Ambassador William Porter. Hepatitis forced his return to the U.S. in 1967 and he returned to RAND.

Dr. Ellsberg then began working on the McNamara study of U.S. decision making in Vietnam. This study is now known as the Pentagon Papers. In late 1968 he coordinated the development of a range of policy "options" on Vietnam for Henry Kissinger. He also prepared National Security Study Memorandum No. 1 in 1969, which was a set of questions sent to all agencies dealing with Vietnam and then helped to summarize the answers to those questions for President Nixon.

"The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine" is an award winning essay by Dr. Ellsberg which

was published in 1970 for the M.I. T. Center for International Studies. His book, PAPERS ON THE WARS, was published by Simon and Schuster in July 1972. It may be of interest to our readers to learn that Daniel Ellsberg entered the Marine Corps approximately eight months after Hank Hohenstein (who assisted Manuel Klausner in interviewing Ellsberg) had enlisted. Though they had never served together, their training was very similar and both became infantry officers and served in infantry battalions. Their paths, though diverse, were entwined with the Department of Defense, since Hank remained very active in the Marine Corps Reserve until 1969. As late as 1968 he was privileged to attend various secret briefings when the credibility gap became too great to tolerate. As Hank states, "One did not have to read the newspaper nor be an especially astute tactician to understand that the military were not only deceiving the American people but even dedeiving themselves and that we were fighting a war we had lost militarily. But more importantly, because of our actions in Vietnam, we had lost the 'other war,' the war for the people."

Hank (who was featured several weeks ago in TIME as one of the San Diego Ten, a group of conservative and libertarian tax resisters recently on trial in San Diego) adds, "I sadly remember, and I'm certain Dan does also, the often heard comment, 'Hell, Marine, any war is better than no war.'"

Dan Ellsberg is a bright, articulate, and fascinating individual. Although he is not a libertarian, he does espouse certain positions which are in harmony with the libertarian philosophy. REASON expects this interview to provoke controversy among our readers, and we look forward to hearing your reaction to Ellsberg's views and actions.

REASON: First of all, Dan, is there an untold story about the Pentagon Papers and your disclosure of the Papers?

ELLSBERG: There are various stories that the Justice Department would probably like me to put out at this point, but I think that would tempt them too much to bring a second indictment in Boston. The current indictment deals only with the period during which the Papers were copied and given to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. It ends in September 1970. The Boston Grand Jury that has been investigating the distribution side of the Papers that went beyond the Congress, really only began sometime after September 1970. So if I were to talk about that now it simply would encourage them to indict a lot of people that later helped me in the distribution process that ended with the Pentagon Papers getting out to the newspapers. I don't care to talk about that.

REASON: What did you want to accomplish? What was your purpose in embarking upon the activities that led to your dissemination of the Pentagon Papers?

ELLSBERG: The only thing that I could personally hope to achieve by my own efforts was to make these documents available to the American public for them to read and to learn from. I couldn't force them to read the documents-let alone to learn from and act on them-but I could hope to make it possible for them to read them as opposed to the situation where the studies were sitting in my safe at the Rand Corporation. In that situation I was almost the only person in the country authorized to study and derive lessons from them. The theory was that those lessons would be put to use by the Executive Branch. But what the Pentagon Papers told me when I read them was that the Executive Branch was determined not to learn lessons from its experience in Vietnam. While the United States Government had experienced a series of failures that called for a change in our policy, successive administrations had really seen our experience as a succession of adequate successes. Each President had managed to postpone the day when the country, and specifically when he, would have to acknowledge a mistake or defeat. To this day, of course, no President has acknowledged any such mistake or defeat. So Richard Nixon is the fifth president in a row who counts his Vietnam policy a success to this point. The history in the Pentagon Papers told me that if others were to learn a different lesson it would have to be people outside the Executive Branch and they would have to have the physical capability to read the papers. So the papers had to leave my safe.

I tried first through the Senate and did not really succeed in making it available even to the whole of

Congress, let alone to the people. Ultimately it was through the newspapers that the American public first saw large sections of the Pentagon Papers. But it wasn't until the Executive Branch had been induced to bring out its own declassified version through the Government Printing Office and Beacon Press brought out a somewhat fuller version-the so-called Senator Mike Gravel version-that I felt my task had been accomplished.

REASON: Did you also have a purpose in disclosing the Pentagon Papers of trying to show any detriment in the Government's policy of classifying information?

ELLSBERG: Yes. A very important secondary objective-second only to the objective of getting a change in our Vietnam policy-was the hope of changing the tolerance of Executive secrecy that had grown up over the last quarter of a century both in Congress and the courts and in the public at large. It seemed to me that our Vietnam policy reflected an accumulation of Executive power, which in turn had exploited very critically this tolerance of Executive secrecy. In other words, I felt that without the widespread willingness to allow the Executive to keep secret the mass of information about its own operations and intentions, it wouldn't have been possible for the Executive to steal away so much power from the Congress and the public and to free itself from the kinds of checks and balances that were intended in the Constitution. Precisely because Congressmen realized over the years that they lacked the information on which to criticize Executive policy or to suggest changes, they have opted out from an active role in the field of foreign policy. But by the same token, it was the Executive Branch itself which was denying them this information. So that what we saw was one more confirmation of the axiom on which I think our Constitution was originally built, which is, "power corrupts-even Americans." Power encroaches upon the challenges of the opposition, and officials in the Executive Branch, given a chance to paralyze opposition by practicing secrecy and deception, will use that power. I think that the Vietnam war was one cost of that process. The price we paid for allowing a single branch of Government to emerge as dominating almost exclusively the field of foreign policy and defense policy has been a quarter century of the Vietnam war-which means the price has been a couple of million of Vietnamese lives and over fifty thousand American lives, and 135 billion dollars in the last eight years alone.

REASON: Certain constitutional lawyers feel that your acts may well cause greater Federal control and greater attempts at secrecy. Do you think your action may result in allowing the Federal Government to have greater control over information, further restricting First Amendment rights?

ELLSBERG: I don't think so, though I had some fear that that was possible when I set out on this course. As I say, I had two goals-enlightening the people about the Vietnam War in hopes that they would act to end it, and alerting them to the danger of the secrecy system. What you're saying is that in the eyes of some people I could have set back the second goal as I was pursuing the first. In actual fact, I don't think that it's working that way. The instinct of the Executive Branch is of course to keep its secrets and to protect its secrets, but it has always had that instinct, and of course it was to be expected that in the light of my challenge and the challenge of other people who have released information that they would move to prosecute me and to deter other people. But the reaction of Congress has not been to support that Executive program. On the contrary, one of the useful effects of the revelations of the Pentagon Papers has been the series of hearings conducted by Congressman Moorehead's subcommittee on government information. The eight volumes of the Moorehead hearings are serious reading that I recommend greatly. I've read all of them and learned a great deal from them. Not only do they present a great deal of information about the way the classification system really works, but there's a good deal of discussion of possible legislation that would have the effect of cutting back the Executive's ability to keep secrets from Congressmen. I think that that is the direction that Congressional action is likely to take, and I think there will be Congressional action. So I think the net effect in that direction will be a good one-a very good one.

REASON: Do you believe that the classification process tends not to particularly benefit the Government, because foreign powers tend to have knowledge of what we're doing very rapidly, and the only thing it really protects is the people in power from their own people.

ELLSBERG: Well, I'm not saying that there should be no secrets or that there's no information an enemy could use to harm the United States. I am saying that the way the secrecy system operates now, the risks and dangers and costs that it imposes enormously outweigh the benefits of the secrecy; so much so, in fact, that I would be willing to say that a system that is the negation of what we have now—that is, the demolition of the current system of safeguards would be better than what we have right now. That isn't to say that some secrets could not be justified. It just seems to me that the proper kind of system must be controlled to a large extent outside the Executive Branch; at least it cannot be controlled exclusively by the Executive Branch as it is today. A system that allows some secrets has to be a limited one, because relatively few secrets can be kept from the American people if we are to remain a democracy; and it must have safeguards built in against the abuse of it.

What we have now is an essentially unlimited system with no safeguards whatever against abuse, and we do have almost unlimited abuse. What I mean by safeguards would be criteria to begin with that would constrain the kind of information that can be kept secret, and a system for monitoring the actual practices. The monitoring would have to be done in part outside—or even entirely outside—the Executive Branch. I emphasize that because the essence of a system that is tolerable in a democracy would be a system that does not allow the Executive to be the sole judge of what the public is allowed to know about how officials are doing their job. That means that Congress has to set forth the constraints and criteria—and to set up a body that would do a large part of the monitoring. There should also be appeal to the courts. Essentially, there is none now. The courts have really refused to take up the question of whether classification in a given instance has been proper, and that is an abdication of their responsibility.

So it should provide explicitly for appeal to courts, for appeal to Congress, on decisions as to whether a given secret is to be kept. Additionally, there must be more review within the Executive Branch itself—but that alone isn't enough. You come down to the principle that no one man, even the President, should be allowed to decide without review that certain kinds of information cannot be known to American citizens. The situation we have now is that not only can one man do that, but closer to 100,000 men, as individuals, can decide, each without practical review.

REASON: Much of the material that was released in the Pentagon Papers had been released on a gradual basis in certain public statements by certain individuals and certain memoirs. Do you think that the Government came down so hard on you because you made a specific challenge to their authority to classify and release?

ELLSBERG: Not entirely. That was part of it. This is a point that I think is being misunderstood by people who are following the trial. Whether certain kinds of information about Government policies were "available" as information depends on the credibility of the channel, the source by which that information became available to a particular hearer. A great deal of the information—even some of the most important information in the Pentagon Papers was available to someone who was skeptical of the credibility of our highest officials. If you were prepared to discount the assertions being made by our Presidents and their spokesmen and to weigh heavily the contradictory assertions that were coming from the critics of our policy, or skeptics, or foreign sources—then you could pick up and learn and act on most of the most important information in the Pentagon Papers. If, on the other hand, you put a great deal of weight on what Presidents said, then the Pentagon Papers have a great deal to tell you. Because the Pentagon Papers are documentary evidence that the Presidents were lying. To whom then did these documents convey a great deal of information? To whom are they valuable? Not to foreigners on the whole, or foreign adversaries. Ho Chi Minh did not need a document to know the President misrepresented the very things being said to Ho Chi Minh in negotiations, or the actions the U.S. was taking against North Vietnam. So they had little to learn from the Pentagon Papers. The same is true of domestic critics who were sufficiently skeptical of releases from the White House; but to credulous Congressmen and many American voters who wanted very much to give the benefit of the doubt to the President, then the existence of documentary evidence made a great deal of difference. In particular, it makes the difference to an American between passivity and a willingness to act in opposition to the President. For such an American, he has to be almost sure the President is wrong before he will really

change his party or speak out openly, risk his job, or risk his career, let alone go to prison. And I think for a lot of Americans these documents made a significant difference.

REASON: A lot of REASON'S readers are by nature skeptical of announcements from government officials—we look for example at President Nixon's statements or "commitments" that he would not impose wage price controls or that he would not devalue the dollar. What do you view as the major lies that the Pentagon Papers have disclosed in terms of American Presidents' announcements about the war and our involvement in Indochina.

ELLSBERG: Well, various categories arise. Some had to do with the impression available to the Presidents themselves as to the situation in Vietnam, the origins of the war and the legalities of the situation. Others had to do with their intentions at a given time—of the plans that they foresaw having to put into effect and the likely scale of the war that lay ahead. On the first count I would say a major deception that runs right through five Administrations is the clear deceit that we were significantly, let alone essentially, concerned with freedom from foreign intervention for the Vietnamese people. I would say that to look at these papers you can only conclude that five Administrations were very clear in their mind that they believed foreign intervention—by ourselves—was both essential and legitimate and was the cornerstone of our policy.

REASON: To characterize our intervention the executive branch would use the word "just"? .

ELLSBERG: Well, there is no great difference; if any difference, between what is now known as the Nixon doctrine and the Brezhnev doctrine of the Russian right to intervene in the affairs of Czechoslovakia. In fact, I think that if the Kremlin Papers relating to interventions like Czechoslovakia and Hungary were to be revealed you'd see very little difference in attitude from the Pentagon Papers. Our interests, world order in general, the need to prevent dominoes from falling, damage to our prestige, or if we should be humiliated—all of this as rationale for intervention, would have its counterpart in the Kremlin.

REASON: Wasn't the domino theory discredited even by the CIA? Didn't the Pentagon Papers show us that?

ELLSBERG: Well yes, in the form that the Presidents usually said it, it was discredited. Namely, the notion that the other countries of Southeast Asia would quickly, and almost surely, come under Communist domination. CIA has not really endorsed that idea since the mid '50s. On the other hand, I think our Presidents did believe that a clear-cut failure in Vietnam would have repercussions that our leaders wanted to avoid. For one thing, I think each administration has felt very clearly ever since the so-called fall of China to the Communists in 1949 that the important domino that would fall would be the White House; it would be their own control of power, if they should be in office when Communist successes took place that they had failed to avert.

REASON: Do you think that Communist containment was the overriding objective of these five Administrations?

ELLSBERG: No. I think that there was an overall policy that can be described as anti-communist, or that can as easily be described as counter-revolutionary, in the sense of maintaining our business and governmental access to as much of the resources of the world as possible. And within this overall policy, usually the most convenient rationale for intervening against a regime that might exclude our influence was the claim that that regime was dominated by Communists or was likely to become dominated by Communists, because that was a claim that would find a good deal of support for intervention—support from a lot of Americans who otherwise would feel more relaxed about the change.

REASON: Was there not an attempt to deny the Communists, in this case the Chinese Communists, access to the vital Rice Bowl of South Vietnam?

ELLSBERG: Well, I don't think they felt that would make a great deal of difference. The best experts that were available never really endorsed the idea that Southeast Asia, in any sense, economic or otherwise, had to fall under the total domination either of Vietnam or of China if Vietnam became Communist. I think that they did to some extent worry about dominoes, even if the dominoes, in other words were not sure to fall. They did worry about effects of a Communist success that would be an American failure. But I don't think that the dominoes they worried most about were in Southeast Asia. I think they worried more about whatever effects might occur in the Middle East, Europe and Latin America, and in Russia and above all in the U.S.A.

REASON: Probably much of the American public believed we had a valid right to interfere in the affairs of North and South Vietnam. We'd like to get into your evolution of thought in this area. In other words, whether you at one time supported a concept of Pax Americana-and what your position was initially, at the time you were in the Marine Corps and what your position is now?

ELLSBERG: My position was that of many other people. There's an unquestioned faith in the goodwill and good intentions of the American Government in contrast to the bad intentions of our major adversary, the Russians. And therefore I shared that other widespread belief that even though we might well make mistakes in a given area, it was better that we make the mistakes for those people in the area than that it come under the domination of our major adversaries. I didn't know much then about the history of imperialism, in its various forms, but I have been reading more of the literature recently, and I see how in the late nineteenth century, in Europe, all the Western countries were scrambling for authority, but the central thinking of each one of them was the thought that if they didn't take over and administer the people and resources of a given area, some other influence would prevail that would be much worse, even for the people of the area. The French thought, "If not us, the Germans," and vice versa for the Germans. We thought in connection with the Philippines, "If not us the Germans, or somebody else." And it's this item of faith that although we're undoubtedly not perfect, we're better than those other guys who will run this place if we don't: whether those other guys are foreigners to the area or feudal or criminal elements in the area itself. If we don't control, the alternative is chaos, anarchy, imperialism, slavery and so forth. So we didn't have to feel that we were angelic, entirely altruistic or perfect, to feel that we were still serving the interests of the people of the area when we proceeded to serve our own interests. This is a pretty unquestioned belief.

REASON: When you say that you've been going back to historians on our imperialist activities, have you been reading any revisionist historians such as Harry Elmer Barnes or Gabriel Kolko?

ELLSBERG: I've read little of Barnes since he's very early, but I've read quite a bit now of the literature that has followed William Appleman Williams' theses in *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, including that by Kolko, Lloyd Gardner, Gar Alperowitz, and a very interesting new book by Richard Friedland, *The Truman Doctrine And The Origins Of McCarthyism*.

And it's worth noting I think that what has made this revision of our understanding of American policy possible is the gradual declassification of World War I records. In fact these books come out year by year as the State Department has gotten around to making records available year by year. They've gone up to about 1949; although Kolko's latest book leaps forward to 1954, really the documentation has been available only to '49 or '50. For the period between World War II and the end after Korean War, between '46 and '54, the Moorehead hearings show that over 300 million pages are still classified, in addition to the 170 million pages from World War II. SO the bulk of the declassification still remains to be done. Now the major reason why I felt the Pentagon Papers ought to come out was the feeling that we couldn't afford to wait twenty-five years to learn what there was to be learned from the documentary history of this period. We have to learn these lessons faster.

REASON: I think our readers would be interested in knowing how you characterize yourself politically?

ELLSBERG: Well, earlier I would have called myself a cold war Democrat using the words cold war

without any apology, meaning views like Acheson's in foreign policy and Harry Truman's in domestic policy; that is, liberalism in domestic policy and a sort of hard line approach on foreign policy. Of course, I'm very conscious of the role both parties have played in maintaining the cold war, in Vietnam specifically. I'm in a state of transition now and trying to learn. Certainly though by any standards I've moved towards the left. And I happen to have been very influenced by the people who are radical pacifists and anarchists, which is not a simple political philosophy. It is an attitude toward life and culture and politics would mention for example people in the War Resisters League and the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

REASON: How do you feel about government policies such as import quotas or subsidies to corporations?

ELLSBERG: Well, although I've got a Ph.D. in economics—a long time ago at Harvard—I never did study international economics very much and I haven't really practiced as an economist. So I'm not up on such subjects. But the study of the past couple of years has convinced me increasingly that economic motivation did underline a great deal of the policy that I helped to implement—that's the cold war policy—with concern for maintaining trade, investments and sales in undeveloped countries and in Western Europe really as the tacit motive that lay underneath a great deal of our policy. That policy was described to the public as defensive, as addressed to military threats to our allies in Western Europe and other parts of the world; and it appears that this rationale was used fairly consciously as a basis for a very large defense budget which would stabilize the economy and for foreign aid and interventions that would maintain our exports.

REASON: You mentioned that both parties share a great deal of blame in maintaining the war in Vietnam. Do you consider this a function of the parties themselves or of the bureaucratic infrastructure which they may not have any control over?

ELLSBERG: Well, on that point, I have come less and less to emphasize the bureaucratic pressure, to which I did give a lot of importance when I was in the bureaucracy four or five years ago. I think there is currently an academic scholarly trend towards emphasizing the importance of bureaucratic pressures, and I think it's greatly overdone. Even as of a couple of years ago I was inclined to emphasize much more the domestic political pressures rather than bureaucratic—and this is something that I learned from my own experience and from the Pentagon Papers, which made quite clear that the policy the President chose was often one that he alone espoused within the bureaucratic system. It seemed clear that he was responding to pressures outside the bureaucratic system. Elements like the Air Force or the Joint Chiefs of Staff certainly didn't want to get out of Vietnam, but they proposed policies fairly different from the ones the President actually followed. It's not possible to hold them responsible for the actual choice which the President pursued—so I was led to see the very great responsibility of the President himself, and to conjecture what the pressures were that did influence them. These seemed to be domestic political pressures. Now, in the last couple of years I've studied and learned, I think, more and more about the influence on the parties and the party system and on the President himself, of economic interests, corporate interest—and I would include unions and class interests. It so happens that I think that traditional leftists or Marxists have simplified the problem in a misleading way, in such a way as to imply that the President simply takes his orders via telephone from Wall Street. Now I don't think it's possible to explain Vietnam that way. In fact, Wall Street has been very skeptical of Vietnam, for at least several years while the war has gone on. At the same time I think these economic interests are important, but I think that they work through the political system, through the major political parties, through the system of nominations and competition between the parties, and that this is an interaction that has yet to be explored enough or to be understood very well. So I think that to understand Vietnam, and I don't think I do understand it adequately yet, I've a strong feeling that it's necessary for us to come to understand how economic interests structure political competition within the country: determine the kinds of candidates that are able to be nominated and to get campaign funding and media attention, and influence the workings of Congress and the general workings of the political system. I don't think one can afford to ignore either the economic interests, nor to abstract from the political system through which these interests affect policy. I've sketched out a framework there that I think no one to my

knowledge has adequately explored yet.

REASON: What do you feel would be a desirable American foreign policy today?

ELLSBERG: I would like to see very much less United States intervention of all kinds-not only military, but economic and covert. Less interference in the affairs of other nations, both the underdeveloped nations of the world and for that matter the developed countries,-our Western European allies and others. I think that the attitude that intervention and control was necessary to our well-being really reflected special interests in this country far more than our general welfare. And of course it did involve us in disastrous interventions from which a great many people suffered in America and many, many more suffered outside of America. On the one hand I would like to see us stop believing that we have the right to police foreign areas or to send Americans abroad to die and kill in the kinds of causes in which we've done so for the last twenty-five years. But I would also like to see much less U.S. money and resources go to support conservative, or reactionary, police state regimes abroad. What aid we should give-and I think we should give aid to the rest of the world-should be almost entirely channeled through international multilateral organizations, which would save us from the belief that we had a right to interfere in those countries that were recipients. In other words I think there should be a transfer of resources from this country to other parts of the world, but not at the cost of a great deal of American intervention in those countries. I think they would be better off without any aid whatsoever than if it came in the form that enabled us to believe that it was our business to run their governments.

REASON: Don't you feel a forced transfer of resources abroad is entirely amiss-for the federal government to tax American citizens and dispense their funds abroad-as against private investment abroad.

ELLSBERG: I really do think that our influence on most other countries in the world-and this is still heresy from anyone who has considered himself a liberal or a moderate-that our influence has been on the whole negative, and that we've deluded ourselves in believing we've had a beneficent effect with the aid we've given and the intervention we've given. That is to say, I'm not terrified at the thought of major cutbacks in foreign aid of the kind that Congress seemed about to require a year or so ago. Of course if we cut out every kind of economic aid and left ourselves simply with direct aid to military dictatorships; that would not be a move for the better.

REASON: What if you went all the way and eliminated all types of aid, including aid to military dictatorships?

ELLSBERG: You see, I think that would be better than what we're doing right now. But I don't say that's the best possible situation. I think a better situation would be for us to get in a position where we could, without hypocrisy, really support the U.N. Charter that we signed twenty-five years ago, and the principles of human rights which are so mocked by most of the regimes to which we ally ourselves or support: regimes which are actually dependent on us, where human freedoms are no more respected than they are in the least progressive of the Communist regimes.

So, many of the things that are happening violate fundamental human rights-proscriptions against torture; to take one sharp example. Our own practice in the past twenty years really prevents us from being the kind of world influence that I would like us to be. Not only have our governments told us that we must ally ourselves with and support, uncritically, rightwing regimes that practice torture, but the Vietnam experience has put us in the large-scale business of torture directly, both in the literal sense of widespread practice of torture under our eyes by our Vietnamese allies and by our own troops; and in a metaphorical, more terrible form of torturing the population of North Vietnam by deliberate use of population bombing to try to coerce Hanoi into accepting our terms of settlement. And while we pursue such a course over a matter of years on the largest scale possible, we can hardly be in a position to criticize regimes like Greece or Brazil in their practice of torture of political prisoners. The very imprisonment of political prisoners is another matter of violation of human rights on which we're not able to speak with any moral authority. Of course the possibility of such pressure having an effect is

indicated by the sensitivity of the Greek regime to their being denounced and ostracized by other European countries. But what is much worse than the fact that we're not able to denounce them, is we actually support these regimes. South Vietnam itself is a very strong example.

REASON: When you talk about your desire to live up to the United Nations Charter and to try to implement the protection of human rights, do you see any correlation between the growth of bigger and bigger government and at the same time the demise of individual freedom?

ELLSBERG: Yes. Certainly. Obviously. And the effect in our case of Executive dominance has been to reduce the differences between being a citizen of the United States and a citizen of much less free societies. Even Communist societies. Now there still is a big difference, but the difference is less. And that's not the direction I would like to see us move. The difference is less because we're becoming less free in many respects. Now that doesn't mean that there's no freedom left here—we still do have one of the freest presses in the world, but it's the clear intent of the Nixon Administration to change that situation significantly, which is the direction of the changes that have taken place in the Philippines recently and in many countries such as France, Greece and Korea in the last few years alone.

REASON: Are you trying to draw a corollary then between your case and the Nixon administration's attack on the press?

ELLSBERG: Well, there are a number of recent cases which are part of the conscious campaign of the Nixon Administration to reduce the force of the First Amendment, to greatly reduce the freedom of speech and of the press of America. Because of my study of the Pentagon Papers and my need to prepare for my trial, I have become increasingly conscious of how valuable the First Amendment is. I think that here I find myself disagreeing with a lot of people on the left who are relatively tolerant of revolutionary regimes that have kept a tight control of the press and of freedom of speech, thought, and political opposition. There are young Americans who are tolerant of the idea that these are bourgeois liberties that simply support basically unjust, elitist regimes, and that at least during a transition period to a more just regime one can be quite relaxed about giving up such liberties. So they're relatively relaxed even when a regime like Nixon's acts against such freedoms, because they don't see them as fundamental.

REASON: Ludwig von Mises, one of the great free market economists, observed that freedom of the press is really meaningless if the government would own all the printing presses and he made this observation in the context of emphasizing the importance of private property. I gather by your previous answer that you are not in agreement with some of the individuals in the New Left, for example, who are very much against private property. Where do you stand on the importance of private property in a free society?

ELLSBERG: Well, the word "left" covers so many different things right now; certainly there are a lot of attitudes that I don't share. When I say that I've questioned a great deal of the beliefs that I once held or all the beliefs I once held, when I'm in a state of questioning and searching for more realistic and more humane politics, as I look about, I find, for instance that many people who see themselves as on the left are relatively uncritical and careless of the powers of the state. They're very sensitive to the power of large private interests, corporate power, economic power. And I don't think, by the way, that they necessarily exaggerate this power or the threat that it imposes, but many of them are led in the direction of countering that power with the bureaucratic state power, not so much in New Deal terms as on the model of the newer revolutionary regimes. On the other hand I think that a lot of conservative citizens in the country are properly sensitive to the threat of state power and to the need for such freedom—for freedom of the press, free speech and so forth—but at the same time are insensitive to the need for controls on private power and corporate power.

REASON: Of course many of the American conservatives who use rhetoric in defense of individual freedom and in defense of freedom of the press were among the most strong opponents, at the outset, of publishing the Pentagon Papers. Don't you feel that despite their rhetoric that many American

conservatives really pursue a policy of opposing individual rights in advocating growth of big government?

ELLSBERG: Well yes. Obviously it would be mistaken to see Bill Buckley as a conservative in a libertarian sense of the word "conservative". In fact as I listen to him I see him only as a monarchist and a Tory. He seems almost totally uncritical of state power if it is wielded by the major economic interests for economic intervention all over the world. Whereas on the other hand I find a great deal to learn from the early criticisms by Robert Taft of our interventions both in Korea and in sending troops to Europe, and I think he expressed the dangers there very well.

REASON: The American conservative movement has shifted ideologically as far as foreign affairs since Robert Taft and there are many right wingers today that would consider Taft to be very mistaken even though he was regarded at the time as one of the great conservatives.

ELLSBERG: But those are right wingers with whom now I would disagree. I was reading just the other day a comment on the Bricker amendment, which was regarded as the very definition of reactionary isolationism in the 50's and was opposed by Eisenhower and Dulles, as much as by Democrats. I think that many people like me would regard something like the Bricker amendment as very sound today. This would have limited the power of the Executive to make Executive agreements in foreign affairs.

REASON: Given your role at Rand, 'what type role do you see for a Rand, a think-tank corporation, in the formulation of future foreign policy?

ELLSBERG: It seems clear that major problems of this country have to do with protecting our citizenry and our form of self government from our own Executive branch, That can only be done, not by advice and consultation machinery within that Executive branch but by confronting the Executive branch with citizens' power organized in other forms outside the Executive branch: through Congress, through citizens' associations of various kinds, through unions, through a diffusion of power and responsibility relating to foreign policy outside the Executive Branch. I can't really get interested any more in improving the flow of advice and information within the Executive branch itself-on the contrary, I'm not at all sympathetic to the notion that talent and intellect and energy of people interested in foreign affairs should continue to be channeled toward service to the Executive branch. I'd much rather see the ability of Congress to analyze these matters built up and of information and discussion that will result from the jostling about of powerful bodies with somewhat different constituencies and power houses, will result in more public enlightenment than you're going to get any other way. And more public involvement and probably a more pacific policy; because the people who designed our government believed not that every

American was a pacifist at heart, but that the people who provided the men and the resources for wars were least likely to favor war or prolong war and that the more democratic a policy the more pacific it would be. One can find counter examples to that but I think that over the long run experience shows that they were wise.

REASON: What you're exactly saying is that people don't make wars, it's states that make wars?

ELLSBERG: Well, the states can certainly manipulate the people more easily than we would like, but I still think that the very lying that each of these administrations has done for the last twenty-five years is a tribute to their own belief that the people would not support this war if they understood truly what was being done.

REASON: If you look at the practicalities of your view that state and local governments should speak out-here you've been on trial now for many weeks in Los Angeles-it seems to me paradoxical that you would call out for greater municipal or state speaking on a foreign policy when Sam Yorty as Mayor of Los Angeles or Ronald Reagan as Governor of California both have been very strong advocates of the hawkish policy in Vietnam.

ELLSBERG: That's true. Well, first, you know I didn't pick this place for my trial. I am saying, though, quite frankly that although I know that Yorty has been often ridiculed for having a foreign policy, I don't think that's foolish myself, especially in a case like Vietnam, and I think that he should be judged by the content of his foreign policy to some extent. If that's what the people of Los Angeles want, all right. And if it isn't, they should remove him.

REASON: Where do you stand on the question of conscription? Do you think conscription is a proper and desirable policy?

ELLSBERG: No. It's involuntary servitude and should be held unconstitutional.

REASON: How would you effect the repatriation of those who fled the country to evade the draft?

ELLSBERG: I think the greater number of them-not to speak for every single individual-deserve our respect and I would hope that we can bring them back so we can learn from them and from their example. Learn why there were not more. How they and their wives recognized the moral issue that conscription does present in a war like Vietnam. How they came to see it as clearly as many of them did and to act against it as decisively as many of them did. You know, the truth is a great many Americans, including my own grandparents, came to this country precisely because they faced this issue in their homelands. And they made decisions that were just like those who went to Sweden and Canada in this case. My own grandfather came here because he didn't want to spend seven years of his life in the Czar's army. That's true of a great many Russians and Germans. This is nothing new in the world's history it's just too bad that the land of freedom to which they came has become one that takes it for granted that citizens owe a large part of their lives to the state.

REASON: What about the question of amnesty to those Americans who evaded the draft. Do you think that amnesty should be granted across the board? Would you impose any conditions on amnesty such as service in a national Peace Corps?

ELLSBERG: No. First of all, there's a great hypocrisy about this by both Administration and Congress, when we ignore the fact that if you use the word "draft evasion" you're talking about millions of upper middle class Americans who didn't come close to being drafted because they were able to go to college or have subsidized marriages at a very early age or were able to get various kinds of medical waivers from kindly doctors. And this includes virtually all of the children of Congress or of high level administrators-almost without exception. So these are people who don't really come up against the issue of amnesty in a legal sense because the country never made any legal demand on them to go abroad. The poorer ones who couldn't afford those approaches and who had to face the issue that this war has been wrong and unconstitutional from the start-the courts, far from allowing such people to test that proposal in the courts in an orderly way, have refused to take up the issue. And thus the courts closed off the chance for an orderly legal challenge, leaving no choice but the dilemma of evasion-leaving the country, for violating laws whose constitutionality had not been tested in the immediate situation-or of taking part in a clearly wrong war, risking their lives in an effort that they should never have been asked to join and risking the possible necessity of killing innocent people. So I'm really sympathetic to the people who chose not to take part. And frankly I say that not only from the perspective of somebody who volunteered for the Marine Corps, but as somebody who volunteered to go to Vietnam and came back only when I had hepatitis. I look back on that experience not as someone who thereby has more moral authority, patriotic authority than these others, but as somebody who persisted in illusions about what was the right thing to do and what the nature of the war was and what the proper demands on the country were, longer than these others. In some cases they had fewer illusions to lose because they hadn't been trained into it by twenty years of government propaganda with respect to war, so again it's not that they were necessarily innately more clear-sighted. The fact is that I think they saw in a very realistic way and I think they reacted appropriately. Again, Vietnam is not a routine situation. To refuse to serve in the Vietnam War, I think, could be justified from a very wide variety of positions.

REASON: Doesn't in fact the ability of the state to draft tend to prolong most combat situations?

ELLSBERG: Yes. The draft clearly made it possible for the Executive branch to get into a very large ground combat involvement without calling up reserves or without going to Congress for a new mobilization of resources, and that the absence of the draft would make it much more difficult for future administrations to involve us in future conflicts.

REASON: Do you have any view on the question of reparations to Vietnam?

ELLSBERG: Obviously, I think by any standard of justice we owe a tremendous amount to the rebuilding of South Vietnam and North Vietnam: keeping in mind, by the way, that an enormous majority of our bombs were dropped on South Vietnam-our supposed ally-rather than on North Vietnam. Nevertheless, I think they would be very foolish to accept that money at the price of a large American infrastructure of AID technicians who were going to decide-in a supposedly nonpolitical way-how the money was to be spent and who was to spend it.

REASON: When you say we owe reparations, what about somebody who opposed the war and was a consistent opponent of the American intervention in Vietnam-do you think he should be required to give of his money to help rebuild either North or South Vietnam?

ELLSBERG: I don't know too many people who haven't paid taxes to support the war, so. I don't know too many, then, who have a very strong moral position on which to say they are not willing to devote any part of their tax money to rebuilding.

REASON: Do you think it would be at all proper to look to those in positions of responsibility, in terms of guiding national policies in the war, to be personally culpable, so that they should have to pay reparations from their own personal fortunes-say Nixon, or MacNamara-that they should have to pay personally for the damage and devastation in Vietnam.

ELLSBERG: It's a very interesting suggestion. For instance, perhaps, a few years of personal service of the kind that they've often talked about, devoted to putting one stone on top of another in some of the villages in Vietnam, would be quite rehabilitating for them. Nevertheless, I wouldn't say that that should be involuntary. I would think if it were to do them or their society much good it should reflect their own new awareness, which I think is yet to blossom in their hearts, that they have misspent a good part of their lives and that something like this would be a better use of some of their remaining years than what they're now doing.

REASON: There are a number of American conservatives that deplore your conduct and Anthony Russo's conduct in disclosing the contents of the Pentagon Papers to the American public. They feel this is an unpatriotic act that really was in defiance of American policy and you should be punished therefore-but at the same time there are many American conservatives who have applauded disclosures of confidential information and leaks in other situations such as the Otepka case. It was felt that the disclosure was one that would aid in the battle to cleanse the State Department of Communists. Could you comment on that?

ELLSBERG: Well, that's two special viewpoints I think, that don't exhaust the points of view on this situation. To see our act as unpatriotic or against American policy is, I think, to identify the government with the Executive branch-indeed with the President-and to take not just the position, "my country right or wrong," but, "my President right or wrong." And that's really a position that wipes out the distinctions between American democracy and monarchic or autocratic forms of government. To see our act as a clearly disobedient or disloyal one is still to equate loyalty with obedience to a single boss. And that wasn't the founding theory of our American government. It's certainly possible to see our act as mistaken or misguided somehow, but that judgment has to be made in the light of the rather complex obligations that any American should recognize toward the Constitution, towards several branches of government, towards his countryman, toward humane feelings. I think that it is hard to apply that more complicated test and conclude that we did the wrong thing.

REASON: I'd also like to ask just briefly about finances, Dan-could you address that subject for our readers?

ELLSBERG: Well, yes. The defense is not being financed by the state, but I guarantee you all of the prosecution is. The government has spent two to three million dollars already on the case and that comes from taxpayers of course. We have some taxpayers also contributing to our side of the case. The defense has cost over \$600,000 already and may well come to over three-quarters of a million dollars before it is through. The defense relies entirely on private contributions and we'll be happy to get any, addressed to The Pentagon Papers Defense Fund, 125 West Fourth Street, Los Angeles.

REASON: Let me ask you a concluding question, Dan, that fits into the context of one of your answers a couple of moments ago-in talking about the obligations of American citizens and the complex questions of viewing the propriety of your conduct. Your attorney, Leonard Boudin, stated in his opening argument, at the commencement of trial, that it was not only the right of an American citizen and a former government official to give the information to Congress that you disclosed, but that it was your *duty*.

ELLSBERG: Yes. That I felt intuitively at the time. The more I've learned about the Constitution and the ideas that underlay it, the more I've realized that my intuition was valid. The whole classification system as it exists and as it is practiced now, the system that has inevitably led to the suppressing of a billion pages of information is an unconstitutional system. I think a limited system that would be constitutionally valid could be devised, but that remains to be done. And the current system is a clear violation of the principles of checks and balances in the government and a violation of the First Amendment. Moreover, I think our constitutional principles are very sound on this point. Secrecy on this scale is incompatible with democratic government, and I think not only incompatible, but subversive of it. A republican, democratic form of government cannot survive with the practice of Executive secrecy that we have experienced in the last quarter of a century. We must roll back that practice of secrecy if we are to undo a betrayal of the American Revolution.

Attached Files

- [Why I Dit It!](#), PDF, 2.1 MB

Try Reason's award-winning print edition today! Your first issue is FREE if you are not completely satisfied.